COMMONWEALTH of LEARNING

Strengthening Institutional Effectiveness for Graduate Employability in India

Graduate Employability in Open Universities: A Stakeholders' Consultative Workshop Report

10–12 December 2024

Graduate Employability in Open Universities in India:
A Stakeholders' Consultative Workshop

Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in collaboration with Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University, Bhopal
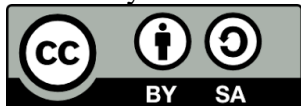
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The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources, and technologies.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Graduate Employability in Open Universities in India: A Stakeholders' Consultative Workshop, hosted by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) in collaboration with Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University (MPBOU), addressed the critical challenges and opportunities related to enhancing employability for graduates of open universities in India. Held from December 10 to 12, 2024, the workshop convened academic leaders, policymakers and industry experts to explore strategic frameworks for aligning education with workforce demands.

Led by experts from COL and COL-CEMCA, this event marked a significant step in bridging the gap between academic pursuits and ever-evolving job market demands. The project aligns with the focus on employability embedded in the Ahmedabad Declaration that was adopted by all the open universities in India. The workshop was attended by 21 participants (18 men and three women), including professors and senior faculty members, directors of quality assurance cells, registrars and administrative heads and heads of departments from 15 open universities in India, who were oriented on the key objectives of the workshop, the Graduate Employability Framework and its implementation. Sixteen participants reported enhanced knowledge for graduate employability at the end of the stakeholders' meeting.

Objectives

The workshop was organised around the following key objectives, as the workshop aimed to:

1. Analyse current employability trends, policies and literature in India to inform framework development.
2. Evaluate employability practices in higher education institutions, identifying challenges, gaps and successes.
3. Examine employability trends and skills required in the job market.
4. Facilitate stakeholder discussions on aligning graduate skills with market demands.
5. Create an employability readiness scorecard to measure institutional progress and readiness.
6. Share pilot project findings to encourage collaboration and scale effective practices.

Overview of Deliberations

The workshop was structured as a three-day event featuring an inaugural session, followed by technical sessions, panel discussions, group work, focused group discussions, roundtable meetings, and concluding with a valedictory session.

Day 1: 10 December 2024

Day 1 of the workshop began with site visits to the historic Sanchi Stupa and the National Institute of Technical Teachers Training and Research (NITTTR), an institution dedicated to advancing technical education and enhancing teaching quality nationwide.

Dr B. Gopal Krishna, co-coordinator of the workshop, welcomed participants and outlined the workshop's objectives, which included

tackling employability challenges, integrating emerging skills into curricula and promoting collaboration among open universities to bridge the gap between academia and industry. The aim was to empower open universities as leaders in advancing employability through collective expertise and actionable strategies.

The inaugural session featured several key addresses. Professor Sharanappa V. Halse, Vice Chancellor of Karnataka State Open University (KSOU), emphasised the critical role of open universities in societal empowerment and the importance of skill-based education. He highlighted the resilience of students who balance education with employment and called for skill upgrades among educators to improve student employability. Dr C. C. Tripathi, Director of the NITTTR, reinforced the transformative potential of vocational education in improving employability and affirmed open universities' mission to democratise education and ensure its accessibility across the nation.

Professor Sanjay Tiwari, Vice Chancellor of MPBOU, discussed the challenges faced by open universities, such as skill gaps, limited practical exposure and lack of strong alumni networks. He stressed the importance of integrating skill-based courses into curricula, aligning them with market demands and building industry partnerships to enhance employability. He also brought attention to the need to adopt curriculum enhancements driven by National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to better meet the needs of students and employers.

Dr B. Shadrach, Director of COL-CEMCA, addressed the complexity of employability, noting it encompasses skills, experience, certification, attitude and networking. He pointed out the gaps between academia and industry, emphasising that many graduates face underemployment due to skills mismatches. He called for aligning curricula with industry requirements and leveraging the flexibility of the NEP 2020 to integrate skill-based credits. Dr Shadrach also urged open universities to improve perceptions of their graduates among employers by promoting success stories and adopting flexible, industry-responsive curricula.

Dr Shadrach with Professor Tiwari.

The inaugural day set a strong foundation for addressing employability challenges through collaboration, innovation and alignment with market needs. The discussions pointed out the importance of skill development, industry partnerships and institutional reforms in enhancing graduate outcomes and preparing students for a rapidly evolving workforce.

Day 2: 11 December 2024
Day 2 of the workshop focused on providing strategic insights and actionable frameworks to enhance graduate employability in Indian open universities. In his welcome address, Professor Tiwari stressed on the need for collective action and dialogue to equip graduates with education that leads to sustained excellence and employability.

Dr Shadrach, delivering the opening remarks, noted the collaborative efforts of 15 participating open universities and expressed optimism about

engaging all 17 state open universities in the future. He revisited the Ahmedabad Declaration, reinforcing commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the NEP 2020, and improving access to education for marginalised groups. Dr Shadrach called for reskilling and upskilling initiatives, the development of industry-relevant courses and leveraging technologies like community radio to expand access. He also advocated for creating a Consortium of Open Universities to facilitate resource sharing, reduce costs and improve employability outcomes.

Dr Shadrach addressing the participants at the workshop.

Introduction to the Graduate Employability Framework

Introducing the Graduate Employability Framework, Dr Jako Olivier, Advisor: Higher Education at COL, underlined the importance of aligning education with workforce demands. He elaborated on COL's Employability Model and the strategic focus on graduate readiness within open and distance learning contexts. Dr Olivier stressed the need to prepare students for emerging digital and AI-driven opportunities and introduced resources developed by COL to help institutions integrate employability frameworks into their curricula and improve graduate outcomes.
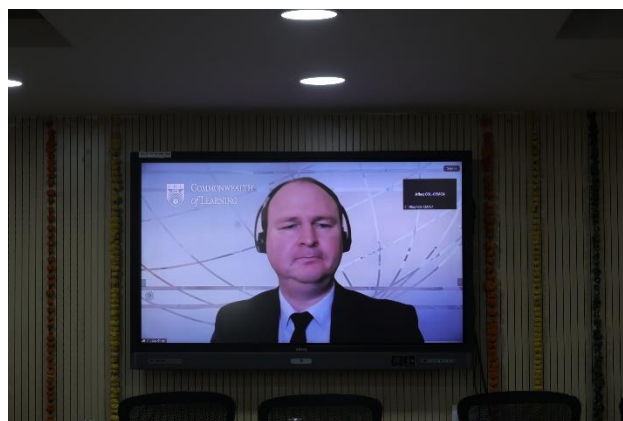
Dr Olivier delivering his address through online mode.

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu, Advisor: Higher Education at COL, provided an overview of COL's three-year employability initiative, designed to enhance graduate readiness through structured frameworks, experiential learning and the development of emerging skills. She outlined a phased approach starting with baseline assessments and capacity building, progressing to framework implementation, and ending with the dissemination and evaluation of outcomes. Professor Agbu stressed the importance of stakeholder collaboration and continuous monitoring for the initiative's success.
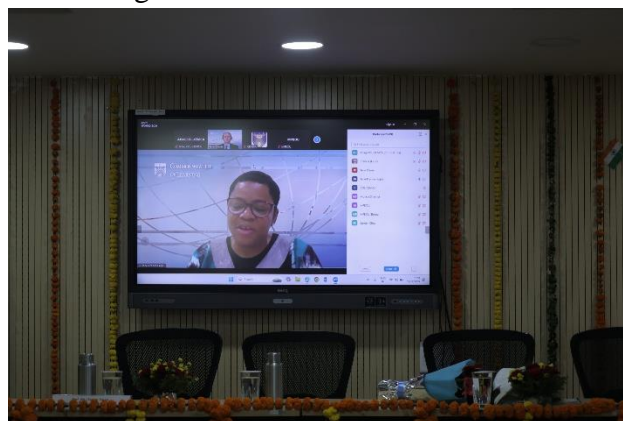
Professor Agbu presenting during the workshop session.

Status review of graduate employability and emerging skills in India

Dr O. P. Goel, Former Advisor at the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), shared

findings from the study on graduate employability and emerging skills in India. He highlighted the need to address the education and employment gap and leverage India's youthful demographic in the face of rapid economic and technological changes. Dr Goel noted systemic challenges, such as overemphasis on theoretical learning, outdated curricula and inadequate assessment methods. He advocated for aligning curricula with industry needs, fostering professional collaboration, and incorporating soft skills like resilience, emotional intelligence and ethical behaviour. Dr Goel proposed a dual education model that blends classroom learning with on-the-job training and emphasised the importance of future-ready skills such as adaptability, business acumen and technological literacy.

Group discussion on understanding graduate employability

The group work session led by Dr Ashish Awadhiya focused on defining employability and identifying the key skills required for graduate success. The definitions underlined employability as a combination of professional, transferable and personal skills that enable career advancement and societal contribution. The skills identified included communication, problem-solving, adaptability, emotional intelligence and digital literacy. Common themes across groups included the importance of communication skills, flexibility, teamwork, ethical values and self-awareness.

Presentation on employability practices and emerging skills in Australia

The session on best practices and emerging skills in Australia, led by Dr Sarojni Choy, provided valuable insights into developing skills to improve employability. Dr Choy discussed Australian practices, including categorising employability skills into cognitive, methodological, social and vocational clusters. She demonstrated the Triple Helix Model, which fosters collaboration between industry, universities and government to align education with market needs. Dr Choy also introduced models like the skills ecosystem and career edge, which prioritise stakeholder collaboration, work-integrated learning (WIL) and a balance of academic and career development skills. She urged Indian institutions to tailor these strategies to their contexts for scalable outcomes.

Panel discussion on bridging the gap: Merging skills with employability in Madhya Pradesh

The panel explored the evolving nature of education and workforce alignment, focusing on curriculum modernisation, stronger collaboration between industry and academia and value-driven education. Panellists proposed solutions like integrating vocational training into mainstream education and enhancing professional development for educators.

Exploring the graduate employability practices of institutions

Dr Awadhiya's session on graduate employability practices introduced COL's Employability Model, a four-phase framework designed to bridge the gap between education and industry requirements. The phases include assessment and sensitisation, planning and strategy development, implementation and practical exposure, and evaluation and feedback. Dr Awadhiya highlighted successful practices in Indian open universities, such as dedicated placement cells, skill development centres and specialised vocational courses like digital

marketing and data science. He also pointed out challenges, such as the mismatch between education and industry needs, and recommended strengthening industry partnerships, integrating internships and fostering entrepreneurship.

During group work following the presentation by Dr Awadhiya, participants shared best practices, including Nalanda Open University's (NOU) holistic approach, Uttarakhand Open University's (UOU) vocational courses, Vardhaman Mahaveer Open University's (VMOU) government collaborations, and Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University's (YCMOU) specialised agriculture courses. Key strategies discussed were vocational training, industry partnerships, internships and alumni networks for career support.

In sum, day 2 of the workshop showcased the importance of strategic insights and actionable frameworks to enhance graduate employability. The sessions collectively underscored the value of structured frameworks, industry collaboration and adapting best practices to local contexts to prepare graduates for a rapidly evolving job market. By integrating these approaches, open universities can better equip students with the skills needed to thrive in the workforce.

Day 3: 12 December 2024
The final day of the workshop focused on evaluating current practices related to graduate employability in open universities across India by identifying existing gaps and discussing strategies for future enhancements leading up to the valedictory session.

Presentation on the Graduate Employability Scorecard
Dr Awadhiya presented the Graduate Employability Scorecard, which assessed employability initiatives in universities using 90 parameters across four stages. The findings revealed that while universities had made strong foundational efforts, particularly in career awareness and vocational training, there were significant gaps in advanced stages, such as entrepreneurship, business simulations and industry placements. Dr Awadhiya recommended integrating skills relevant for industry into curricula, enhancing internships, fostering alumni networks and aligning strategies with national frameworks like the NEP 2020 and Skill India to improve employability.

Group discussion on strategies for addressing employability gaps and improving graduate outcomes
The participants engaged in group discussions to brainstorm strategies for addressing employability gaps and improving outcomes for graduates. Each group focused on different aspects of employability.

Group 1 concentrated on aligning the talent pool with industry demands. They proposed prioritising students who were actively seeking employment and collaborating with brokerage and placement agencies to address job placement gaps. They also recommended facilitating access to grants and loans to support entrepreneurship, as well as using SWOT analyses to help identify strengths and weaknesses in career guidance efforts.

Group 2 focused on enhancing employability through internships, apprenticeships and business simulations. The group recommended offering both physical and digital internships, developing infrastructure for business simulations and strengthening the connections between universities and industries. The group also suggested conducting career preparedness

surveys to assess student readiness and guide job fairs, in addition to educating students about financial support options such as grants and loans for startups.

Group 3 addressed remaining employability gaps and proposed hosting virtual conferences where final-year students could present their work, as well as building industry linkages for mutual problem-solving and funding. They also recommended incorporating career induction programmes during student orientation, offering workshops on financial literacy and providing guidance on managing credit and entrepreneurship funding. To track progress, they suggested implementing digital portfolios for students to monitor postgraduate development.

Group 4 discussed the role of community colleges in improving employability through vocational diplomas. They acknowledged the success of community colleges but emphasised the need for financial support. The group recommended that the University Grants Commission (UGC) recognise and fund these colleges to continue contributing to vocational education and skill development.

A glimpse from the group work session.

Strategies for mainstreaming graduate employability and emerging skills in open universities in India

After the group work, the session continued with Dr Goel's presentation on the need for a paradigm shift in India's open education system to align graduate employability with industry needs. Dr Goel advocated for a skills-first approach, suggesting that universities design programmes with employability as the end goal. He underscored the importance of aligning curricula, teaching methodologies and faculty competencies with industry requirements to make employability an integral part of the educational process. Key discussion points from Dr Goel's session included bridging the gap between education and industry, creating industry-relevant programmes, encouraging industry collaborations, encouraging entrepreneurship and financial literacy, and overcoming regulatory hurdles.

The group work and Dr Goel's session together highlighted strategies for integrating employability into the open education system, focusing on quality assurance, capacity building and regulatory alignment. Group 4 stressed the need for robust assessment methods, including project work and on-the-job training, and suggested continuous feedback from various stakeholders to refine courses. They also proposed a modular approach to skill development to meet diverse student needs. Group 3 recommended enhancing industry engagement by combining academic content with apprenticeship programmes and developing a shared cost structure for funding. Group 2 identified challenges such as faculty shortages and inadequate infrastructure, recommending collaborations with industry experts to develop relevant learning materials. Group 1 focused on the regulatory barriers to employability integration, proposing involvement of industry

representatives in decision-making bodies and streamlining regulatory processes.

Valedictory session

The valedictory ceremony that concluded the workshop featured addresses by prominent guests. Dr Shadrach reflected on the success of the workshop, particularly Madhya Pradesh's pioneering efforts in implementing NEP 2020. He emphasised the importance of collaboration among open universities to address skill development gaps and expressed hope that the workshop's insights would have a transformative impact on education and skill development across India's open universities.

In his keynote address, Professor S. Arumugam, Vice Chancellor of Tamil Nadu Open University (TNOU), acknowledged the financial struggles that students face despite receiving government aid and called for collective efforts from the education sector and society to address these challenges. He discussed the unique role of open universities in providing skill development opportunities and preparing students for meaningful long-term employment. Shri Inder Singh Parmar, in his special address, underscored the importance of instilling values of gratitude and respect for nature through education, stressing the need for a cultural shift towards sustainable development. He also pledged support for collaborations between open universities and organisations like COL-CEMCA to strengthen education and employability.

The workshop concluded with an expression of gratitude for the participants and organisers, with a renewed commitment to fostering partnerships and innovative strategies for improving graduate employability in India's open education system.

Key recommendations

The Graduate Employability in Open Universities: A Stakeholders' Consultative Workshop produced nine key recommendations for stakeholders, with implications for COL-CEMCA:

1. **Curriculum alignment and skill integration:** Revise curricula to meet industry demands, incorporating skills like digital literacy, emotional intelligence and problem-solving. Introduce modular courses aligned with national frameworks (e.g., NEP 2020, NCVET).
2. **Industry collaboration:** Establish MOUs with industries for internships, training and mentorship. Create industry advisory panels for ongoing feedback.
3. **Open educational resources:** Develop and share open educational resources (OER) to ensure equitable access to learning materials, focusing on skill development and industry-specific competencies. Promote open licensing for reuse and redistribution.
4. **Graduate Employability Scorecard:** Implement a scorecard for regular institutional assessment that tracks employability and guides data-driven improvements.

Group photo of the workshop participants.

5. **Faculty and administrator capacity building:** Offer training for faculty on skill integration and experiential learning and encourage industry exchange programmes.

6. **Career support services:** Strengthen career counselling, job fairs and placement drives to connect students with employers.

7. **Focus on marginalised groups:** Extend outreach to underserved groups, offering courses on financial literacy and entrepreneurship for self-employment.

8. **Institutional collaboration and policy advocacy:** Foster collaboration among open universities through a consortium and advocate for policies supporting micro-credentials and credit transfer.

9. **Monitoring and evaluation:** Implement feedback systems to assess the impact of interventions and develop a national-level employability dashboard for benchmarking and sharing best practices.

These recommendations aim to improve graduate employability across open universities in India, aligning with global standards and national goals.

Conclusion

The workshop underlined the urgency of addressing graduate employability as a multidimensional challenge requiring collective action from educators, industry leaders and policymakers. By adopting the proposed strategies, open universities in India can bridge the gap between academic learning and market needs, empowering graduates to thrive in an evolving global workforce.

1. Introduction

The implementation of employability frameworks and skills is a critical focus for the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), as outlined in COL's Strategic Plan (2021–2027). Governments, businesses and higher education institutions around the world continue to grapple with emerging skills required for a future-ready workforce, as well as challenges arising from the mismatch between qualifications and the skills required to gain and sustain employment in the ever-changing world of work. Graduate employability is a mounting concern for educational institutions globally.

Although literacy rates continue to grow in many countries, there has not been a corresponding increase in graduate employment. UNESCO's 2016 World Social Science Report found that the most effective and sustainable route out of poverty for the working-age population is a decent, paid job supported by effective labour market institutions and that success in employment relies on access to quality education. A lack of decent work and opportunities was ranked seventh in a global sample. The top concern regarding the lack of decent work across the world and almost all demographics was that education systems were not teaching the skills needed to find employment and navigate through life after education has been completed (UNESCO, 2021). Before the ways in which graduate employability can be discussed further, it is first necessary to define what this concept entails. In essence, employability refers to the combination of skills, knowledge, and personal qualities that enhance an individual's ability to secure and maintain employment. However, defining employability has been a challenge for various institutions due to the diverse range of skills and attributes involved. These include both profession-specific skills and transferable, or "soft," skills. The concept of employability is complex, as the required skills vary based on factors such as job role, industry, and career stage. As a result, establishing a single, universally applicable definition or list of employability skills is difficult. For the purpose of this workshop, the broad notion was adopted that employability, when well developed, is a strategic collaboration between the employers, educational institutions and government in which the evolving needs and values of each sector are thoughtfully considered in the life of a learner. An important consideration is that employability should be transferrable across sectors and adaptable to the ever-changing technological landscape.

To address the challenge of graduate employability in India, COL-CEMCA organised a comprehensive sensitisation workshop that

brought together key stakeholders from open universities in India, experts and consultants. This collaborative workshop served as a crucial platform to share and discuss the findings from the baseline assessment of current employability challenges and opportunities within open universities. Additionally, the initiative included the development of an employability scorecard system at open universities, which provides metrics to assess how effectively institutions prepare graduates for the workforce. The scorecard reports, once collated, offer valuable insights into areas requiring intervention and help establish benchmarks for measuring progress in improving graduate employability across the Commonwealth network. This systematic approach aligns with COL's Strategic Plan (2021–2027) and responds directly to UNESCO's findings regarding the critical need to align educational outcomes with workforce requirements.

1.1 Workshop Context and Objectives

The workshop titled Graduate Employability in Open Universities: A Stakeholders' Consultative Workshop was held from 10 to 12 December 2024 at MPBOU. Organised by COL and the COL-CEMCA, the workshop aimed to address the critical challenge of graduate employability in India's open universities. It served as a platform for eminent persons, heads, directors,

professors and administrators of state open universities in India to deliberate and chalk out the pathway for effectively strengthening graduate employability in their respective universities. The specific objectives of the workshop were as follows:

1. To identify and analyse current trends, policies and literature on employability skills required in India to establish a foundation for framework development.
2. To assess the state of employability practices in higher education institutions to highlight key challenges, gaps and successful initiatives for potential improvements.
3. To understand employability trends and needs in higher education institutions.
4. To engage key stakeholders in discussions about necessary graduate skills, institutional roles and alignment of graduate skills with market needs.
5. To develop an employability readiness scorecard that allows institutions to assess and track their readiness and progress in improving graduate employability.
6. To disseminate findings and lessons from the pilot project to a wider audience, encouraging collaboration and potential scaling of the initiative.

2. Partners

The project was launched with the signing of a non-financial contribution agreement between COL-CEMCA and multiple open universities across India, emphasising collaborative efforts to enhance graduate employability.

The following open universities partnered under this agreement:

	Name of the Open University	State
1.	Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU)	Guwahati, Assam
2.	Nalanda Open University (NOU)	Nalanda, Bihar
3.	Pandit Sundarlal Sharma Open University (PSSOU)	Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh
4.	Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University (BAOU)	Ahmedabad, Gujarat
5.	Jharkhand State Open University (JSOU)	Ranchi, Jharkhand
6.	Karnataka State Open University (KSOU)	Mysuru, Karnataka
7.	Sreenarayanaguru Open University (SGOU)	Kollam, Kerala
8.	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University (MPBOU)	Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh (host university)
9.	Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University (YCMOU)	Nashik, Maharashtra
10.	Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University (PSOU)	Patiala, Punjab
11.	Vardhman Mahaveer Open University (VMOU)	Kota, Rajasthan
12.	Tamil Nadu Open University (TNOU)	Chennai, Tamil Nadu
13.	Dr B. R. Ambedkar Open University (BRAOU)	Hyderabad, Telangana
14.	Uttarakhand Open University (UOU)	Haldwani, Uttarakhand
15.	U. P. Rajarshi Tandon Open University (UPRTOU)	Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh
16.	Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU)	Kolkata, West Bengal

This collaborative network of open universities has committed to sharing best practices, implementing structured frameworks for employability, and aligning with national policies such as the NEP 2020 and the Ahmedabad Declaration as set out by open universities and COL-CEMCA in August 2023.

3. Profile of Attendees

The workshop saw active participation from a diverse group of representatives (21, M18/F3) nominated by their respective open universities across India. The attendees were carefully selected to ensure a blend of both academic expertise and administrative leadership**,** with a special focus on their role in shaping institutional policies and employability strategies.

The participants included:

- Professors and senior faculty members**:** As they are engaged in both teaching and curriculum development, they bring subject-matter expertise and insights into academic programme delivery.
- Directors of quality assurance cells**:** Responsible for monitoring and enhancing the quality of education, they ensure alignment with national education policies and standards.
- Registrars and administrative heads**:** They are key decision-makers involved in institutional governance, policy implementation and administrative reforms.
- Heads of departments**:** They contribute specialised knowledge related to curriculum design, skill development and industry alignment.

Many of the attendees held dual roles as both faculty members and administrators, making them uniquely positioned to influence policy development, institutional reforms and the adoption of the Graduate Employability Scorecard within their universities.

This diverse representation ensured a holistic approach to discussions, balancing pedagogical perspectives with institutional governance and ultimately fostering collaborative strategies for improving graduate employability across India's open universities.

4. Workshop Structure

The workshop was a three-day event held from December 10 to 12, 2024, at MPBOU in Bhopal.

Day 1 began with the inaugural session**,** featuring welcome addresses by key dignitaries and a reminder of the Ahmedabad Declaration**.** The focus was on setting the context for the workshop, with an emphasis on the importance of aligning education with industry demands and national policies. The opening remarks stressed the need for structured frameworks and institutional collaboration in improving employability across open universities.

Day 2 consisted of technical sessions led by experts, followed by group work where participants discussed best practices from their respective institutions and presented their findings. The sessions covered employability frameworks, industry collaboration models and career readiness strategies. A panel discussion was also held, where industry experts, policymakers and academic leaders exchanged insights on closing the gap between education and job market expectations.

Day 3 continued with additional technical sessions, focusing on refining employability strategies and ways in which to implement the Graduate Employability Scorecard. The highlight was a roundtable meeting with the Minister and Commissioner of Bhopal, discussing support for employability initiatives at open

universities. The workshop concluded with a valedictory session that summarised the key outcomes and reaffirmed the commitment to collaborative efforts for enhancing graduate employability.

5. Activities

5.1 Day 1: 10 December 2024 – Inauguration of the Workshop

5.1.1 Inaugural session

The inaugural day of the workshop was both insightful and engaging, enriched by site visits and thought-provoking discussions. Participants explored the historic Sanchi Stupa and the esteemed National Institute of Technical Teachers Training and Research (NITTTR), a premier institution dedicated to advancing technical education in India. The institution plays a crucial role in equipping educators with the skills needed to enhance teaching quality and expand the reach of technical education nationwide.

The session, headed by Dr B. Gopal Krishna, co-coordinator of the workshop, warmly welcomed the distinguished guests, participants and resource persons. He outlined the workshop's objectives, which included exploring the current state of graduate employability in India and integrating emerging skills into curricula to prepare students for the evolving job market. The three-day workshop aimed to foster collaboration, innovative thinking and strategic planning to empower open universities to lead in addressing employability challenges. Describing the structure of the workshop, Dr Gopal Krishna mentioned that through presentations, group discussions and panel deliberations, participants would work towards drafting actionable strategies to bridge the gap between academia

and industry. By leveraging collective expertise, the workshop sought to position open universities as pioneers in advancing graduate employability.

In a special welcome address, Professor Sharanappa V. Halse, Vice Chancellor of KSOU, lauded the role of open universities in societal empowerment and brought attention to the critical importance of skill-based courses. He recognised the resilience and ambition of students at open universities, many of whom balance employment and studies. Professor Halse highlighted the workshop as a vital platform for teachers to upgrade their skills, enabling them to deliver quality education that enhances students' employability.

The chief guest of the inaugural session, Dr C. C. Tripathi, Director of NITTTR, talked about the transformative potential of vocational education, which offers significant employability advantages over traditional government sector opportunities. He underscored the mission of open universities as democratising education by ensuring that high-quality and accessible education reaches learners across the nation.

5.1.2 Welcome address by Professor Sanjay Tiwari

Professor Sanjay Tiwari, Vice Chancellor of MPBOU, extended a warm welcome to all the distinguished guests, faculty members, directors and representatives from open universities

participating in the workshop on graduate employability. He emphasised the importance of open universities in providing affordable, accessible, and flexible education to millions of students who face barriers to traditional education due to geographical, financial or personal constraints. However, he also acknowledged the need for these institutions to focus on practical skill development and market alignment to enable graduates to thrive in competitive job markets.

Professor Tiwari pointed out the key challenges faced by open universities, such as skill gaps, limited practical exposure and the lack of robust alumni networks. To address these issues, he stressed the importance of benchmarking successful models of institutions, such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), which have taken steps to reduce the stigma often associated with open university degrees. Introducing skill enhancement courses and staying updated with rapid technological advancements were cited as crucial steps toward preparing students for evolving market demands.

He described the workshop as a collaborative platform for sharing insights, enabling policy frameworks and encouraging cross-institutional co-operation among the participating open universities. Professor Tiwari underscored the role of collective networking in overcoming employability challenges and the need for stronger industry partnerships and curriculum enhancements aligned with the objectives of the NEP 2020. He further stressed the importance of integrating skill-based credit courses into degree programmes, which would allow students to earn both academic credentials and industry-relevant skills. Despite initial resistance to this approach due to a traditional mindset, he encouraged

stakeholder engagement and proper planning to ensure the successful implementation of these programmes.

Professor Tiwari concluded by expressing gratitude to COLand COL-CEMCA for their unwavering support in advancing skill development initiatives, particularly the Graduate Employability Project. He mentioned that these initiatives would be pivotal in addressing major challenges faced by open universities in India by providing impactful solutions for skill-based education and career readiness.

Professor Tiwari highlighted that COL-CEMCA's workshops go beyond being mere platforms for discussion. They serve as collaborative efforts to tackle critical issues like graduate employability by promoting policy development, capacity building and cross-institutional partnerships.

5.1.3 Welcome address by Dr B. Shadrach

Dr B. Shadrach, Director of COL-CEMCA, opened his welcome address by expressing gratitude for the warm reception and acknowledging the presence of the distinguished guests and participants from the open universities. He commended the efforts made in organising the workshop and recognised the importance of the event in shaping the future of graduate employability across open universities. He extended special thanks to Professor Tiwari and MPBOU for facilitating and hosting this workshop.

Dr Shadrach emphasised the core concept of graduate employability, defining it as the ability of graduates to secure employment or succeed as

either valuable employees or entrepreneurs. He described that employability goes beyond obtaining a degree and highlighted the importance of skills, competencies and practical experience for workforce readiness. He stressed that open universities in India, despite their critical role in providing inclusive education, must ensure their students are prepared to meet market demands.

He outlined five essential elements necessary for enhancing employability:

1. **Skills and competencies:** Graduates must possess both the technical and transferable skills required by industries.
2. **Experience:** Practical exposure through internships, apprenticeships, and projects during studies is vital.
3. **Certification:** Qualifications must be officially recognised and valued in the job market.
4. **Attitude:** A positive mindset, adaptability and the ability to take responsibility are essential for professional success.
5. **Networking ability:** Building relationships and effective communication help graduates secure better opportunities and to progress in their careers.

Dr Shadrach underscored that open universities need to reflect on whether their graduates are leaving with all five of these elements. He noted the disconnect between academia and industry, stating that many employers find skill gaps among graduates, leading to underemployment. He called for curriculum reforms to ensure skill alignment with market needs, advocating for flexible, industry-responsive curricula that address evolving job roles.

He further stressed the importance of changing the perception of open universities among employers, who often view them as offering substandard education. He cited examples of successful alumni from open universities, including entrepreneurs, sports figures and artists, emphasising the need for active marketing of institutional success stories to change these misconceptions.

Dr Shadrach also acknowledged the opportunities presented by the NEP 2020, particularly the flexibility allowing up to 50 per cent of credits to be skill-based rather than purely academic. He urged institutions to integrate both the National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) and the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) into their programmes. This dual alignment, he argued, could transform open universities into skill hubs capable of bridging the gap between industry and academia.

Concluding his address, Dr Shadrach called for faculty involvement in driving institutional reforms, particularly through the establishment of skill development centres and industry partnerships. He encouraged all participants to take collective responsibility in ensuring that graduates from open universities are not only educated but also employable and equipped with the right skills, experience and professional mindset for long-term success.

5.2 Day 2: 11 December 2024

Professor Tiwari welcomed the participants and expressed his sincere gratitude to COLCOL-CEMCA for organising the workshop.

Professor Tiwari extended a warm welcome to all participants and hoped that the workshop would

provide a platform for meaningful dialogue, actionable strategies and a shared commitment to advancing the employability of graduates from open universities. He called for collective action to work toward a future where education empowers employment and sustains excellence.

He concluded by wishing all participants a productive and enriching workshop and invited Dr B. Shadrach to deliver his opening remarks.

5.2.1 Dr Shadrach's introduction to the Employability Project

Dr Shadrach formally welcomed the faculty members from the 15 participating open universities and acknowledged their contributions to the collaborative effort aimed at enhancing graduate employability. While recognising the absence of two state open universities, he expressed optimism that all 17 state open universities in India would be actively engaged in the initiative over the next three years, ensuring a comprehensive exchange of knowledge and best practices across institutions.

He expressed gratitude to Professor Jane-Frances Agbu and Dr Jako Olivier, Advisors: Higher Education at COL, both key contributors to the Employability Project, and assured full institutional support for the success of the initiative.

Dr Shadrach stressed the significance of graduate employability as a central theme of the workshop and revisited the importance of the Ahmedabad Declaration, signed in August 2023. He described the declaration as a transformative commitment made by the vice chancellors of open universities, focusing on institutional collaboration, skills enhancement and policy alignment for the long-term development of open universities.

Among the 15 commitments outlined in the declaration, he specifically mentioned continued

support for the 2030 Agenda for SDGs, specifically SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). He also stressed alignment with the NEP 2020, particularly the importance of equipping learners with 21st-century skills to prepare them for a rapidly changing workforce.

Another key focus was the goal to enhance gender representation by 50 per cent by 2035, with a target to increase the enrolment of open university learners from 4.8 million to 10 million. Dr Shadrach also underlined the need to extend educational opportunities to vulnerable groups, including migrant workers, persons with disabilities, indigenous communities and rural populations, ensuring equitable access to education for all.

He further elaborated on the commitment to reskilling and upskilling learners by developing industry-relevant courses, internships, and apprenticeship programmes. Dr Shadrach highlighted the importance of transforming open universities into multidisciplinary, resilient and agile institutions capable of adapting to societal and workforce demands.

Collaboration among open universities was another crucial point, with a call to create a Consortium of Open Universities to share the best practices, OER and other resources while collectively negotiating partnerships with government bodies and industries to reduce educational costs. He also stressed the need for a credit transfer framework that would allow greater mobility of students across institutions, including the recognition of micro-credentials.

Dr Shadrach addressed the digital divide, urging open universities to invest in appropriate technologies like community radio stations and internet radio channels to expand educational access, especially in remote areas. He also called attention to COL-CEMCA's efforts in developing a blended learning policy template

that universities could adopt to modernise their learning models.

In closing, Dr Shadrach called for a commitment to innovation and creativity, urging open universities to embrace forward-thinking strategies to enhance educational quality, graduate readiness and institutional collaboration. He encouraged all vice chancellors to uphold the principles of the Ahmedabad Declaration, ensuring that their institutions continue to empower graduates with the necessary skills and competencies to meet modern workforce demands.

5.2.2 Address by Dr Jako Olivier

In his address, Dr Olivier, Advisor: Higher Education, Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, Canada, extended a warm welcome to Dr Shadrach and Professor Agbu, Project Leader and Fellow Advisor in Higher Education. Dr Olivier acknowledged the colleagues in attendance and noted the privilege of being part of the COL audience.

In his address, Dr Olivier introduced the Graduate Employability Project, which aligns with COL's mission to enhance educational quality and employability. He shared insights into COL's initiatives, particularly in the context of the Higher Education Initiative and the Graduate Employability Model. Dr Olivier explained the significance of employability within the educational framework, stating the project's goals and what participants could expect from it moving forward.

COL, established in 1987 by Commonwealth Heads of Government, is a global agency that aims to promote learning for sustainable development. Dr Olivier highlighted COL's role in assisting governments, institutions and organisations to scale and improve the quality of learning, particularly through open and distance learning (ODL) and technology-based education.

He emphasised COL's focus on 56 Commonwealth countries, with a notable emphasis on sub-Saharan Africa, marking the geographical reach of its efforts.

The collaboration between COL, COL-CEMCA, and the Higher Education Initiative was underscored, with a strong emphasis on graduate employability, which is a key focus area in COL's Strategic Plan (2021–2027). Dr Olivier noted that the initiative aims to assist in the development and implementation of employability frameworks within higher education institutions.

Dr Olivier acknowledged the important contributions of Professor Agbu, Dr Shadrach and himself in guiding efforts to promote graduate employability and skills development, especially using ODL. He stressed that higher education must evolve to be responsive to both employer needs and student aspirations, adapting to the dynamic world of work and preparing students for emerging job opportunities in a digital and AI-driven landscape.

He then defined employability as a combination of achievements, skills, knowledge and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to secure employment and succeed in their chosen careers. This not only benefits individuals but also strengthens the broader workforce and economy. Dr Olivier advised that universities must adapt their curricula to foster these skills, ensuring that graduates are ready to meet the demands of the job market.

Dr Olivier raised concerns about the disruption of workers' skills in the coming years, noting that millions of young people currently lack essential skills for employment. He underlined the critical role that educational institutions play in equipping students with skills aligned to workforce needs.

In response to these challenges, COL has developed the Employability Model, which offers three key resources aimed at institutions. These freely available resources include guides on integrating employability into higher education and frameworks for national education agencies and provide practical tools for institutions to improve graduate employability.

5.2.3 Address by Professor Jane-Frances Agbu

Professor Agbu, Advisor: Higher Education, Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, Canada, presented a comprehensive overview of the ongoing Employability Enhancement Initiative. The project, she explained, is a three-year initiative that commenced in September 2024, with completion anticipated in 2027.

Professor Agbu outlined that the programme focuses on cost enhancement with employability attributes, along with the identification and development of emerging employability skills. She noted the importance of monitoring and facilitating experiential learning processes while supporting career counselling initiatives. This includes counsellor training and the development of OER for effective counselling.

Project phases

Phase 1 (current phase)
• Production of draft status review
• Identification of pilot institutions for employability
• Ongoing stakeholder consultations
• Capacity building for employability at the institutional level
• Development of the employability framework
• Collection of baseline data to inform implementation

Phase 2
• Implementation of the framework through capacity building
• Identification of emerging skills
• Development of courses with employability attributes
• Integration of OER
• Course reviews with gender perspectives

Phase 3
• Implementation of the framework
• Course development and enhancement with employability attributes
• Strengthening the interface between employers, labour markets and communities
• Continuous monitoring and accountability measures

Phase 4
• Dissemination of courses
• Monitoring of learner experiences
• Review and adjustment of employability scores
• Final project evaluation and impact assessment

Implementation structure

Professor Agbu acknowledged Dr Shadrach's assistance in organising the implementation process into four geographical zones: East India, Central India, South India and North India. This zoning, she explained, would help manage the implementation process more effectively, given the large number of participating institutions.

Regarding stakeholder engagement, Professor Agbu highlighted the project's emphasis on collaboration and awareness-raising regarding graduate employability and emerging skills in India. Throughout her presentation, she emphasised the project's commitment to

fostering advocacy and research in graduate employability, with a strong focus on continuous monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning. She stated how the initiative aims to strengthen institutional effectiveness in improving graduate employability through these various mechanisms and approaches.

5.2.4 Session: Introduction to the Study on Graduate Employability and Emerging Skills in India

At the session, Dr Goel presented insights from a comprehensive research study conducted by COL on graduate employability and emerging skills in India. He called attention to the critical timing and relevance of the research, given India's unique demographic advantage and the rapidly transforming employment landscape. The study represents a significant effort to address the challenges and opportunities in workforce development while aligning with COL's mission to promote sustainable learning across the Commonwealth nations.

Dr Goel discussed India's demographic position, with approximately half of the population under the age of 25. This demographic advantage offers immense potential for workforce and economic growth. However, he warned that without proper skill development and attitudinal shifts, this potential could turn into a significant challenge. India's rapid economic growth and digital transformation have created increasing demands for skilled workers in emerging sectors, but a disconnect remains between academic preparation and industry requirements. The study underscores the importance of bridging this gap, especially as India aspires to position itself as a global talent hub.

The session provided a structured exploration of the education-to-employment pipeline in India. Dr Goel outlined the study's approach, which included examining historical trends, current

challenges and the disruptive forces shaping graduate employability. He mentioned key factors such as technological advancements, evolving industry needs and global economic shifts. The study also delved into the methodologies used, offering a detailed analysis of data collection, findings, challenges and strategic recommendations. This research serves as a foundation for policy discussions and institutional strategies to improve graduate employability across the nation.

Dr Goel highlighted several critical challenges within the education system that contribute to this gap. First, the strong focus on theoretical learning leaves students unprepared for practical, real-world challenges. For instance, engineering students may study thermodynamics in-depth but lack hands-on experience in operating devices like heat exchangers. Second, academic programmes often fail to keep pace with the rapidly changing needs of industries, as curriculum updates are slow and teachers rely on outdated knowledge. Third, the assessment systems prioritise rote learning over analytical thinking and problem-solving. Finally, structural inertia and limited leadership support within institutions hinder the implementation of necessary reforms.

To address these challenges, Dr Goel proposed several solutions. He brought attention to the need for curriculum reforms to align academic content with industry requirements. This could include involving industry professionals in curriculum design and academic councils to ensure relevance. He also advocated for a greater emphasis on soft skills such as collaboration, resilience, emotional intelligence and ethical behaviour – qualities that are essential for professional success but are often overlooked in traditional academic programmes. Additionally, he suggested adopting a dual education model, similar to Germany's, where classroom learning is complemented by extensive on-the-job training. Such a model would ensure that

students gain practical, industry-relevant experience while addressing the challenges of salary disparities and institutional inertia.

Dr Goel also discussed the importance of future-ready skills, emphasising that employability extends beyond technical knowledge. Key skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, business acumen and interpersonal relations are essential for navigating global trends. He cited the World Economic Forum's identification of critical skill groups, including self-management, interpersonal relations, business handling and technological literacy, as benchmarks for future workforce readiness.

In conclusion, Dr Goel stressed that systemic change is essential to improve graduate employability in India. Collaboration between academia and industry, visionary leadership and a shift toward practical, industry-focused education are vital for preparing India's youth to meet global workforce demands. This study represents a pivotal step toward addressing these challenges and harnessing India's demographic potential to foster sustainable economic growth.

5.2.5 Group work session

During the group work session facilitated by Dr Awadhiya, participants were divided into four groups, each tasked with defining employability and listing key employability skills they identified as crucial for graduate success in the workforce. The group discussions yielded diverse perspectives on employability and a wide range of essential skills. The group work outcomes are summarised below.

Group 1				
Definition of employability	A set of skills that helps individuals secure employment, sustain themselves in an organisation and grow professionally			
Skills	Communication skills	Language skills	Presentation style	Motivational skills
	Attitude and stress management	People management abilities	Adaptability	Psychomotor skills

Group 2				
Definition of employability	The process of preparing learners with adequate skills and competencies that align with present and future employment opportunities			
Skills	Self-awareness	Behavioural and communication skills	Emotional intelligence	Self-empowerment
	Adaptability	Resilience	Technological competencies	

Group 3	
Definition of	A set of skills necessary for professional placement and advancement

employabi lity				
Skills	Communication	Teamwork	Problem-solving ability	Adaptability/Flexibi lity
	Digital literacy	Emotional intelligence	Continuous learning	Integrity
	Market trends	Cultural sensitivity	Environmental awareness	

Group 4				
Definition of employability	A set of skills that meet the demands of a constantly changing job market and address broader societal needs			
Skills	Collaboration	Time management	Problem-solving skills	Decision-making
	Ethical values	Financial literacy	Digital literacy	Communication skills
	Wellness and happiness			

Summary of common themes

Across all groups, the following common skills emerged as crucial for employability:

- Communication skills (verbal, non-verbal and written)
- Adaptability
- Problem-solving and decision-making skills
- The ability to collaborate
- Digital literacy
- Emotional intelligence
- Self-awareness and empowerment
- Ethical values and integrity

Participants present their findings.

The group work session successfully facilitated diverse insights, helping participants collaboratively define employability and prioritise a broad spectrum of skills necessary for graduate success in the evolving job market.

5.2.6 Session: Best practices and emerging skills in Australia

Dr Sarojni Choy, Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, Griffith University,

Australia, led the session on Best Practices and Emerging Skills in Australia, providing valuable insights and feedback based on the group work conducted earlier in the day.

Feedback on group work

Dr Choy commended all four groups for their comprehensive presentations and the enthusiasm demonstrated during the discussions. She acknowledged the alignment of the group findings with the academic literature on employability skills and praised the energy and rigour in the discussions.

Dr Choy speaking at the session.

Key observations and suggestions

- **Clustering of skills:** Dr Choy suggested categorising the identified employability skills into a structured taxonomy for better clarity and implementation.
- **Assessment measures:** She emphasised the need for measurable indicators to assess whether graduates possess these skills, urging the participants to consider how these could be practically evaluated.
- **Vocational literacy:** Highlighting Group 1's focus on literacy, Dr Choy recommended incorporating vocational literacy, noting that different job sectors require varying levels of specialisation in language and technical communication.

- **Resilience:** She appreciated Group 2's inclusion of resilience as a vital skill for today's dynamic workforce.
- **Innovation and creativity:** Group 3's mention of innovation and creativity was acknowledged as critical for future-readiness, though she encouraged adding internationalisation and learning to learn as essential attributes.
- **Wellness and self-care:** Dr Choy praised Group 4's focus on wellness and happiness, emphasising its relevance for long-term career success.

Australian context and best practices

Dr Choy provided a comparative perspective from Australia, offering insights into how employability skills are categorised and integrated into the higher education system.

Skill clusters
She categorised employability skills into four key clusters:

1. Cognitive skills
   a. analytical thinking
   b. critical thinking
   c. creative thinking
   d. foreign language proficiency
   e. adaptability
2. Methodological skills
   a. problem-solving
   b. decision-making
   c. digital literacy
   d. result-oriented performance
   e. self-management
   f. project management
3. Social skills
   a. communication
   b. teamwork
   c. cross-cultural competence
   d. emotional intelligence
   e. stress management
   f. conflict resolution
4. Occupational and vocational skills

a. sector-specific literacy
b. technical competencies based on job roles

The Triple Helix Model for developing employability

Dr Choy described the Triple Helix Model, which emphasises collaboration between industry, universities and government:

Industry	Provides curriculum input, internships and mentorships.
Universities	Develop curricula aligned with industry standards and offer experiential learning.
Government	Creates policy frameworks that support university–industry partnerships.

This collaboration, she explained, ensures skills alignment with market demands, enhancing graduate readiness.

Employability development models in Australia

Dr Choy shared two widely used models for employability development: the Skills Ecosystem Model, which encourages stakeholder collaboration through co-operative programmes and WIL, and the Career Edge Model, which focuses on five key components, namely academic qualifications, work experience, generic skills, emotional intelligence and career development learning.

Key takeaways and final thoughts

- Embedding employability frameworks into university curricula is essential.
- Universities need to focus on WIL and collaborating with industry.
- Skills should be measurable and clear assessment tools should be used.

- Digital readiness and resilience must be prioritised for the future workforce.

Dr Choy concluded by encouraging the participants to adopt these best practices and to tailor them to the Indian educational landscape, ensuring that these practices are relevant and scalable.

5.2.7 Panel discussion

Panel experts

- Dr Jatinder Vir Yakhmi: Senior Professor, HBNI, Former Chairman: AEES, Mumbai
- Shri C. P. Sharma: Managing Director, Daulat Ram Engineering Services Pvt. Ltd., Mandideep
- Dr Rajesh Khambayat: Professor, Head of Technical & Vocational Education, NITTTR, Bhopal
- Shri Rajeev Agrawal: President, Association of All Industries, Mandideep

Key themes and insights from the panel discussion

1. The evolving nature of education and career preparation

The panel emphasised the need to continuously adapt educational frameworks to match the evolving work environment. The focus should be on preparing students for multiple career transitions with skills that allow flexibility in career planning and development.

Key insight

Collaboration between industry and educational institutions is crucial to align education with market demands and technological advancements.

2. Industry collaboration and technological integration

The panel stressed the importance of curriculum modernisation with the latest technologies and industry trends to prepare students for the dynamic job market.

Key suggestions

- Stronger ties between academic institutions and industries should be established.
- Job market needs and digital literacy should be integrated into educational programmes.
- Experiential learning and practical exposure should be prioritised.

3. The purpose of education: knowledge over profit

Dr Yakhmi noted that education should be focused on knowledge acquisition rather than simply a pathway to financial success.

Key quote

"Education is not just a means to earn money but a tool for personal growth and societal development."

Key takeaways

- The guru-shishya tradition of learning in India should be acknowledged.
- Education should promote values, critical thinking and social responsibility.

4. Addressing employment gaps and skill mismatches

The panel acknowledged the disparity between technological advancements and educational practices, leading to skill gaps in the workforce.

Key concerns

- Limited white-collar jobs: There has been a 50 per cent reduction in white-collar jobs over the past five years.
- Outdated curriculum: Education is not keeping pace with technological changes.
- Skill mismatches: There is a lack of alignment between theoretical knowledge and practical applications.

5. Bridging the gap between industry and academia

Shri C. P. Sharma and Shri Rajeev Agrawal stressed the need for greater collaboration between universities and industries to create a more job-ready workforce.

Proposed solutions

- Industry partnerships for co-developing curricula
- Internship programmes and WIL
- Vocational training integrated into mainstream education

6. Professional development and teacher training

Dr Rajesh Khambayat highlighted the importance of ongoing professional development for educators.

Recommendations

- Teachers should accumulate 50 hours of annual professional development as per the NEP.
- Teacher training should be focused on modern pedagogical methods and technological advancements.

Conclusion and way forward

The panel discussion concluded with a collective agreement on the need for the following:

- Modernising curricula by aligning with emerging technologies and market needs.
- Stronger industry partnerships are needed to enhance employability and practical learning.
- Education should be knowledge-driven with a focus on holistic growth rather than just financial success.

5.2.8 Session: Exploring institutional graduate employability practices

The session, led by Dr Awadhiya, delved into institutional graduate employability practices, stressing the importance of a structured approach to preparing students for successful career paths. Dr Awadhiya introduced COL's Employability Model, a comprehensive framework aimed at bridging the gap between educational practices and industry requirements. This model provides a flexible structure that can be tailored to address the unique challenges faced by open universities, including variations in student demographics, regional industry needs and programme specifications.

The COL's Employability Model is designed as a four-phase cycle, ensuring a continuous process of evaluation and improvement.

1. **Phase 1: Assessment and sensitisation**
   This phase focuses on early career awareness initiatives, enabling students to assess their skills and identify gaps through self-assessment surveys. It ensures that students are aware of their employability trajectory from the beginning of their academic journey.

2. **Phase 2: Planning and strategy development**
   The second phase emphasises targeted career counselling, career fairs and vocational training to equip students with critical job market skills. A key component is building partnerships with industries to offer internships and practical learning opportunities that enhance workplace readiness.

3. **Phase 3: Implementation and practical exposure**
   Hands-on learning is prioritised in this phase, with mentorship programmes, industrial placements and project-based learning. Special attention is given to entrepreneurship development through business simulations and functional skill-building activities.

4. **Phase 4: Evaluation and feedback**
   The final phase tracks student outcomes after graduation, measuring employability metrics and gathering feedback from alumni. These insights are critical for refining programmes and ensuring their relevance to the evolving job market.

Dr Awadhiya commended open universities in India that have started implementing innovative employability practices, including dedicated placement cells, skill development centres and collaborations with industries for direct recruitment and career counselling. Many institutions offer specialised vocational courses such as GST filing, digital marketing, data science and agriculture certifications, catering for diverse industry demands. Financial literacy programmes and entrepreneurial mentorship initiatives further support students who aspire to become self-employed.

The session also highlighted key national policies driving these employability practices. The NEP 2020 underscores the importance of skill-based education, while initiatives like Skill India and Make in India promote job readiness. Additionally, the University Grants Commission's Academic Bank of Credit system encourages modular and skill-oriented learning, enabling universities to align their programmes with industry expectations.

Despite these positive developments, challenges persist. Dr Awadhiya noted a significant mismatch between educational outcomes and industry needs, often requiring industries to train graduates for three to four months to make them job-ready. Additionally, limited white-collar job opportunities in certain regions exacerbate employment disparities. To address these challenges, there is a pressing need for multidisciplinary education, soft skills training and greater practical training.

Dr Awadhiya recommended several best practices to enhance graduate employability outcomes. These include adopting structured career development models from the first year of study, strengthening industry partnerships for direct recruitment and incorporating internships, simulations and live projects into academic curricula. He also emphasised the importance of fostering entrepreneurship through financial aid, mentorship and incubation centres. Tracking graduates' progress through alumni networks and conducting placement audits were identified as essential measures for refining institutional strategies.

In conclusion, Dr Awadhiya noted that COL's Employability Model provides a robust framework for improving graduate employability in open universities. By focusing on practical learning, industry collaboration and continuous programme enhancement, institutions can better prepare students for the dynamic job market. Tailoring these strategies to regional contexts while leveraging national frameworks can ensure that students are not only job-ready, but also equipped for entrepreneurship and lifelong learning.

Group work

During the group work session, participants were divided into four groups and tasked with identifying the best employability practices in their respective open universities. Each group presented unique strategies and initiatives that contribute to enhancing graduate employability across institutions.

Dr Awadhiya moderating a group work session.

Group 1: NOU mentioned its holistic approach to education by offering specialised courses such as Yoga Studies and the Yoga Trainer Skill Course, which focuses on personal development alongside professional skills. KOU showcased entrepreneurship education through its BA in Entrepreneurship programme, alongside recruitment efforts focused on rural areas and awareness programmes to improve career readiness.

Additionally, all the participants shared common best practices, such as establishing MOUs with industries and regularly organising job fairs (melas) to bridge the gap between education and employment.

Group 2: UOU highlighted its efforts to integrate vocational and skills-based courses such as Organic Farming, Digital Marketing, Life Skills, Right to Information (RTI), Web Development and E-office Management. These diverse courses aim to equip students with both technical expertise and life skills for better career prospects. Similarly, KKHSOU stressed industry collaborations and the provision of on-the-job training to give students practical experience while studying.

Group 3 featured VMOU, which showcased its strategic MOUs with government agencies such as Rajasthan Knowledge Cooperation Limited to promote skill-based learning and employment opportunities. The university also stressed the importance of forming an alumni association for networking and mentorship. Other common practices within the group included offering internships and skill development courses to ensure that students gain practical exposure alongside theoretical learning.

Group 4 focused on the importance of industry collaboration, specifically mentioning YCMOU, which offers specialised courses in agriculture that align with regional industry needs. All universities in this group reported having placement cells, regularly providing internship training and organising job fairs to connect students with potential employers.

Summary
The group work session showcased a variety of best practices implemented by open universities to enhance graduate employability. Common initiatives included:

- **Vocational and skills training:** This training is provided by offering diverse courses such as Organic Farming, Digital Marketing and Life Skills.
- **Industry partnerships:** MOUs with industries and government agencies have been established to facilitate skill-based learning and employment opportunities.
- **Internships and on-the-job training:** These opportunities provide students with practical exposure to complement theoretical education.
- **Job fairs and placement cells:** By regularly organising career fairs and maintaining active placement cells, students are connected with potential employers.
- **Entrepreneurship and career counselling:** This initiative focuses on programmes and

mentorship to encourage entrepreneurship and career readiness.
- **Alumni engagement:** Forming alumni networks provides mentorship and strengthens industry connections.

5.3 Day 3: 12 December 2024

5.3.1 Session: Overview of the findings of the Graduate Employability Scorecard

Dr Awadhiya's session on the Graduate Employability Scorecard provided a detailed and structured evaluation of employability practices across various universities, offering key insights into their progress and areas for improvement. The scorecard assessment was designed to ensure a comprehensive analysis through multiple stages, parameters and performance metrics.

Structure of the scorecard

The scorecard evaluation was divided into four stages, each focusing on distinct areas of employability practices:

Stage 1	Assessed five focus areas through 18 parameters, including multiple-choice and open-ended questions
Stage 2	Expanded to eight focus areas with 25 parameters
Stage 3	Focused on six areas across 24 parameters
Stage 4	Evaluated six areas with 23 parameters, targeting final-year students and advanced employability strategies

In total, 90 parameters were utilised to evaluate progress, offering a holistic view of graduate employability initiatives. The universities were categorised into three implementation stages using the following rubric:

| Employability target not met | Score less than 2.5 |

27

Employability target partially met	Score of between 2.5 and 3.5
employability target fully met	Score greater than 3.5

Key findings

- **Overall performance:** While some universities excelled, 46 percent scored below the mean employability score. Seven universities performed exceptionally, exceeding the mean score.
- **Career awareness and support:** The universities scored a moderate average of 3.6 for this parameter, indicating room for improvement in fostering career readiness among students.
- **Stage-wise observations:**
  - **Stage 1:** Strong foundational strategies, such as career awareness programmes and baseline surveys, achieved above-threshold scores.
  - **Stages 2 and 3:** Declining performance in strategic employability measures, skill development programmes and placement cell effectiveness. Functional skills and subject-specific training met expectations, but entrepreneurship, industrial placements and mentorship programmes were lacking.
  - **Stage 4:** Significant gaps were observed in areas like business simulations, entrepreneurial finance training and final-year business presentations.

Strengths and weaknesses

- **Strengths:** Foundational strategies like career awareness and vocational training were effectively implemented. Functional skill development and discipline-specific training in the early stages also performed well.

- **Weaknesses:** Stages 2 to 4 revealed gaps in entrepreneurial finance support, technical mentorship and practical learning tools such as business simulations.

Opportunities and threats

- **Opportunities:**
  - Expand entrepreneurial support through grants and mentorship programmes.
  - Strengthen alumni networks to provide guidance and industry connections.
  - Enhance industry collaborations for internships and hands-on training.
- **Threats:**
  - Limited resources and funding constraints.
  - Growing competition from institutions with better infrastructure and resources.
  - Challenges related to how industry views r open universities.

Recommendations for improvement

Dr Awadhiya highlighted actionable steps to address the identified gaps and enhance employability outcomes:

- **Curriculum development:** Integrate industry-relevant skills and competencies into the curriculum.
- **Internship opportunities:** Establish strong partnerships with industries to provide practical exposure.
- **Career awareness programmes:** Strengthen initiatives that help students understand career options and prepare effectively for these options.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Collaborate with industries, alumni and other stakeholders for holistic development.

- **Policy integration:** Align institutional strategies with national frameworks like Skill India, Make in India, and NEP 2020.

Key areas for immediate focus

1. **Brokerage:** Collaborate with placement agencies or HR consultants to streamline student placements. Leverage resources from organisations like All India Council for Technical Education and National Career Services.
2. **Grants and loans:** Explore corporate social responsibility (CSR) funding, Mudra loans and loans for micro, small and medium enterprises and startup grants to support entrepreneurship.
3. **SWOT analyses:** Conduct surveys to assess students' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as part of career development programmes.

Conclusion

Dr Awadhiya concluded by emphasising the importance of collective review and continuous improvement based on the scorecard findings. He thanked participants for their contributions and noted that the presentation would be shared within the subgroup for further analysis and feedback. By focusing on the identified gaps and leveraging opportunities, universities can work towards creating a robust employability ecosystem that prepares graduates for the dynamic job market.

Group work

Group 1

Group 1 addressed the gap between the talent pool in open universities and industry demands. They recommended the following:

- **A focus on employable students:** Prioritise students seeking employment, excluding non-job-seeking groups.

- **Brokerage and placement agencies:** Collaborate with agencies to bridge job placement gaps.
- **Grants and loans for entrepreneurship:** Facilitate access to CSR funding and government schemes like Mudra loans for startup support.
- **SWOT analyses:** Use surveys to identify strengths and weaknesses for career guidance.
- **Career awareness and preparation:** Promote career readiness through placement drives and industry visits.

Group 2

Group 2 emphasised strategies to enhance employability through the following:

- **Internships and apprenticeships:** Offer physical and digital internships, including simulation models.
- **Business simulations:** Develop infrastructure for business simulations.
- **Connections between universities and industry:** Strengthen collaborations with hiring agencies.
- **Career preparedness surveys:** Use surveys to assess career readiness and guide job fairs.
- **Awareness of grants and loans:** Educate students on financial support for startups.

Group 3

Group 3 focused on areas where employability gaps remain, focusing on the following:

- **Virtual conferences:** Host virtual events for final-year students to present their work.
- **Industry research and support:** Build industry linkages for mutual problem-solving and funding.
- **Career induction programmes:** Include career orientation during student induction.
- **Financial literacy:** Provide workshops on managing credit and entrepreneurship funding.

- **Tracking student progress:** Implement digital portfolios for monitoring postgraduate progress.

Group 4

Dr Prakash from TNOU discussed the role of community colleges in employability improvement through vocational diplomas. He highlighted their success but stressed the need for financial support. The group recommended that the UGC should recognise and fund these colleges to continue their contributions to vocational education and skill development.

The session concluded with a call for enhanced financial support and policy frameworks to strengthen employability efforts across institutions.

5.3.2 Session: Strategies for mainstreaming graduate employability and emerging skills in open universities in India

The session led by Dr Goel underscored a paradigm shift in how India's open education system approaches graduate employability. Traditionally, the education system has focused on structured curricula, degrees and teaching roles, leaving students to independently navigate their career paths. Dr Goel challenged this approach by proposing a skills-first mindset, urging universities to start with the end goal of employability in mind. He advocated for tailoring curricula, teaching methodologies and faculty competencies to better align with the skills demanded by industries, thus making employability an integral part of the educational process.

Key discussion points

Five important themes emerged from the session, providing a roadmap for how open universities can better prepare students for the workforce:

1. **Bridging the gap between education and industry:** One of the key takeaways was the need to proactively embed employability within curricula. Rather than treating employability as an afterthought, the session stressed that universities must be more responsive to industry needs and align their programmes accordingly.

2. **Creating programmes relevant to industry:** The discussion also focused on the importance of developing programmes that address both current and future skills demands. These programmes should not only equip students with technical knowledge but also cultivate the soft skills and critical thinking abilities that are essential in today's rapidly changing job market.

3. **Industry collaborations for real-world engagement:** The session called attention to the importance of robust collaborations with industry stakeholders. These partnerships can provide mentorship, internships and opportunities for students to engage in real-world problem-solving, helping them gain valuable experience before entering the workforce.

4. **Encouraging entrepreneurship and financial literacy:** Dr Goel stressed the need to incorporate entrepreneurial skills and financial literacy into curricula. Encouraging a mindset that fosters innovation and self-sufficiency is essential for graduates, particularly in a country where self-employment and entrepreneurship are becoming increasingly important.

5. **Overcoming regulatory hurdles:** To implement these ideas effectively, universities must address various regulatory challenges. Aligning institutional efforts with national policies such as the NEP 2020 was a key focus. The group discussions noted the importance of ensuring that regulatory frameworks support the integration of employability skills into the education system.

A glimpse from the session.

The session provided valuable insights into how India's open education system can better serve the employability needs of its graduates. By shifting the focus to a skills-first approach and aligning academic curricula with industry demands, universities can ensure that students are not only well-educated but also well-prepared for the workforce. The discussions also highlighted the need for greater industry collaboration, capacity building at the institutional level, and a commitment to continuous programme enhancement to address the evolving needs of the job market.

Group work

The session featured focused group discussions where participants addressed various aspects of integrating employability and emerging skills into India's open education system. Each group made significant contributions, proposing strategies and solutions for improving employability outcomes through structured frameworks, industry collaborations and capacity-building initiatives.

Group 4: Quality assurance

- Emphasised robust assessment methods, including on-the-job training and project work.
- Suggested continuous feedback from students, alumni, industry experts and

subject specialists for course improvements.
- Advocated for a modular and flexible approach to skill development, catering to diverse student needs and disciplines.

Group 3: Business model

- Proposed active engagement with local, regional, national and global industries to align academic programmes with job market demands.
- Suggested combining academic content with apprenticeship programmes to provide real-world experience.
- Recommended a shared cost structure: students contribute part, and industries fund the rest via CSR or other funding mechanisms.

Group 2: Capacity building

- Identified challenges such as faculty shortages and inadequate infrastructure.
- Collaborating with industry experts is recommended to develop job-relevant learning materials.
- Suggested improving administrative processes, such as creating student IDs for rural students and strengthening state government support for technical courses.

Group 1: Regulatory framework

- Proposed involving industry representatives and alumni in university decision-making bodies for real-world insights.
- Stressed prioritising the development of labs and practical facilities for skill-based courses.
- Suggested easing regulatory requirements, such as allowing universities to create learner IDs and

simplifying approval processes for technical faculty positions.

These recommendations aim to enhance the integration of employability and emerging skills into the open education system by addressing quality assurance, business sustainability, capacity building and regulatory alignment.

5.3.3 Valedictory ceremony

- Chief guest: Shri Inder Singh Parmar, Honourable Minister of Higher Education, Technical Education, and AYUSH Department, Government of Madhya Pradesh
- Distinguished guests: Professor S. Arumugam, Vice Chancellor, TNOU
- Dr B. Shadrach, Director of COL-CEMCA
- Professor Sanjay Tiwari, Vice Chancellor of MPBOU
- Dr Sushil Manderia, Registrar, MPBOU

5.3.4 The Way-Forward Address by Dr Shadrach

In his valedictory address, Dr Shadrach shared insights from his discussion with Minister Shri Inder Singh Parmar. The Minister showed a deep interest in the opportunities emerging from the workshop and underlined the critical need for providing continuous guidance to every graduate. This aligns with Madhya Pradesh's pioneering efforts in implementing NEP 2020, which is seen as a significant step in shaping the future of education and employability in the state.

Dr Shadrach acknowledged and expressed gratitude to the distinguished guests who participated in the workshop. He extended special thanks to Professor S. Arumugam, Minister Shri Inder Singh Parmar Professor Tiwari Dr Sushil Manderia and other dignitaries

for their valuable presence and contributions to the discussions.

Dr Shadrach delivering the way-forward address.

Reflecting on the workshop proceedings, Dr Shadrach noted the initial challenges, particularly around managing internships and designing skill development programmes. However, as the sessions progressed, these uncertainties transformed into actionable strategies, and participants gained clarity on the path forward. He stated that achieving ambitious goals requires collaboration, co-ordination and coexistence, highlighting the collective effort needed to address the unique challenges faced by open universities.

Dr Shadrach delved into the critical role of open universities in addressing skill development gaps, especially for learners in remote and underserved areas who lack access to traditional higher education institutions. He mentioned that the objective of education is not only to disseminate knowledge but also to empower students with the skills required for meaningful employment. The workshop provided valuable insights into bridging this gap, offering practical solutions to enhance employability.

He specifically praised Madhya Pradesh's leadership in successfully implementing the NEP 2020, making it the first state in India to achieve this milestone. The NEP's focus on education, skills, and ethical values has been instrumental in

preparing the youth for careers in various sectors, including IT, and fostering holistic development aligned with national priorities.

Dr Shadrach expressed gratitude to the participants, whose active engagement was instrumental in the workshop's success. He commended their enthusiasm and contributions to the discussions, which brought forward innovative ideas and solutions to challenges that previously seemed insurmountable.

In his closing remarks, Dr Shadrach extended heartfelt thanks to Professor Tiwari for his continuous guidance and encouragement throughout the workshop. He also acknowledged the contributions of Goel and Dr Awadhiya, who provided critical insights for taking COL's Employability Model forward.

Looking ahead, Dr Shadrach expressed optimism that the knowledge and strategies gained during this workshop would have a lasting and transformative impact on the future of education and skill development across open universities in India.

5.3.5 Keynote address by Professor S. Arumugam

Professor S. Arumugam, Honourable Vice Chancellor of TNOU, began his address by shedding light on a significant issue faced by students, particularly those who receive financial assistance for their education. While government aid often covers tuition and academic expenses, students still struggle to meet their daily needs, creating an ongoing burden. He underlined that addressing this challenge requires a collective effort from the education sector and society. Collaborative platforms like this workshop, he remarked, play a vital role in exploring practical solutions to such multifaceted problems.

Professor Arumugam speaking at the valedictory session.

He further stressed on the unique role of open universities in creating opportunities for skill development. Professor Arumugam stressed that the objective should go beyond merely providing jobs; instead, the focus should be on equipping learners with skills that lead to meaningful, long-term employment. He also focused on the broader responsibility of educational institutions to shape students into responsible and ethical citizens who can actively contribute to societal progress. This, he noted, requires a balance between imparting academic knowledge and fostering character development to ensure the holistic growth of learners.

5.3.6 Special address by Minister Shri Inder Singh Parmar

In his special address, the Minister reflected on a cherished tradition in India, where acts of kindness, such as helping an elder cross the road or giving directions, are met with blessings and gratitude. He underscored that this spirit of gratitude is a cornerstone of Indian culture and must be nurtured and passed on to future generations. He called for a renewed focus on cultivating the attitude of giving back – whether to nature, society, or the resources that sustain us, such as the earth, air and water.

The Minister brought attention to the cultural significance of honouring natural resources like trees, rivers and the environment, emphasising

that education must go beyond knowledge transfer to instil values of respect and gratitude for nature. With India's wealth of renewable resources, such as solar and wind energy, he pointed out the importance of harnessing these for sustainable development while preserving the nation's heritage. Education, he stressed, should inspire future generations to adopt this mindset and contribute to building a sustainable and environmentally respectful future.

Turning to the pressing issue of graduate employability, the Minister addressed the need to provide meaningful employment opportunities for today's educated youth. He emphasised that collaborative efforts between open universities, organisations like COL-CEMCA, and government initiatives are crucial in achieving this goal. In this context, he pledged his full support for fostering partnerships between open universities and COL-CEMCA across various projects, aligning them with government priorities.

The Minister concluded his address by expressing his gratitude to all participants who contributed to the workshop, particularly those who travelled from across the country. He also thanked the organising team for their efforts and the media for their coverage of the event. His closing remarks underscored his commitment to supporting initiatives that strengthen education and employability through collaboration and innovation.

6. Workshop Evaluation

6.1 Pre-workshop Evaluation

**Objective:** To understand participants' expectations, current knowledge and baseline skill levels before the workshop.

The pre-workshop questionnaire was completed by 18 participants, and the results provide insights into their baseline knowledge and confidence levels across key areas.

6.1.1 Gender

Indicate your gender
18 responses

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

16.7%

83.3%
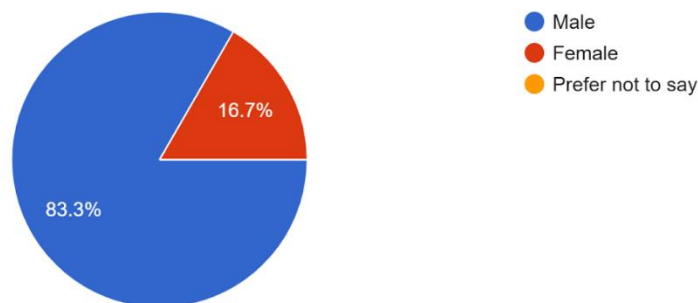
The gender distribution of the workshop indicates that out of 18 participants**,** most were men (15)**,** with only three women**.** This imbalance highlights an opportunity to improve gender diversity in future workshops, fostering a more inclusive environment that ensures varied perspectives and equitable representation in discussions and activities.

6.1.2 Role in institution
The 18 participants' roles in their institutions reflect diverse roles, predominantly from teaching and leadership positions:

- **Assistant professors:** 8
- **Professors:** 3
- **Associate professors:** 2
- **Directors:** 3
- **Registrars:** 1
- **Senior consultant:** 1

6.1.3 Pre-workshop knowledge and confidence levels across different parameters of graduate employability
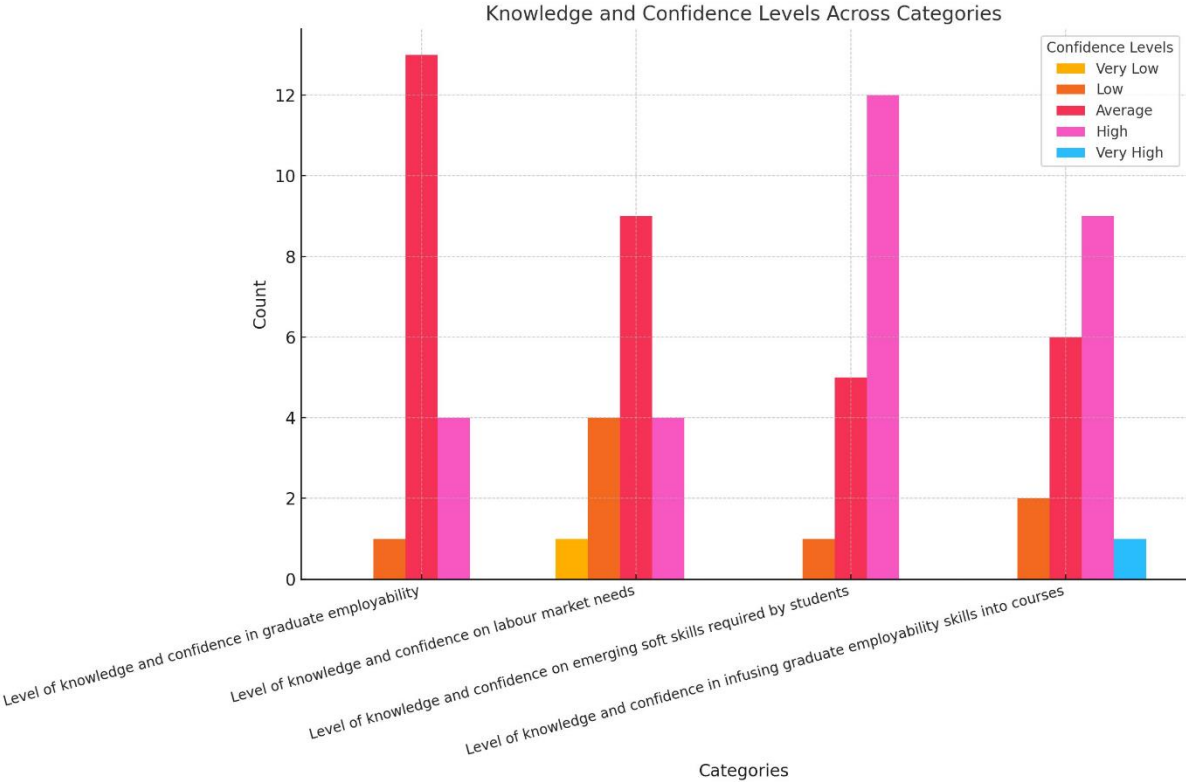
Graph showing participants' level of knowledge and confidence across four key categories related to graduate employability.

The graph illustrates the distribution of responses for levels of knowledge and confidence across four key areas: graduate employability, labour market needs, emerging soft skills and infusing employability skills into courses. The data reveals that "Average" and "High" confidence levels dominate across most categories, particularly in emerging soft skills and infusing employability skills into courses, which show

consistently higher confidence. In contrast, confidence in understanding labour market needs shows variability, with some responses indicating "Low" or "Very low" levels. The graph highlights a need to strengthen confidence in labour market alignment while maintaining a focus on enhancing soft skills and employability integration. Overall, the survey suggests that the participants have baseline knowledge about key aspects of graduate employability.

6.1.4 Participants' expectations and learning objectives for the workshop

The responses highlighted participants' primary goals for attending the workshop, which includes understanding strategies to enhance graduate employability, particularly in the context of ODL. Key focus areas include ensuring employability for ODL students, integrating soft skills and life skills into curricula, and aligning educational programs with market demands and industry requirements. Participants expressed interest in learning international best practices, methods for creating links between industry and universities and approaches to design courses focused on skills and competence. Participants also aimed to gain insights into employment-oriented policies, vocational course development and effective online delivery of technical programs. Overall, the responses reflect a strong emphasis on practical implementation strategies, digital and soft skills, and developing a systematic roadmap for employability in open universities.

6.1.5 Perceived opportunities and benefits of implementing graduate employability processes

The responses emphasise the opportunities and benefits of adopting graduate employability processes, including enhanced student satisfaction, empowerment and confidence in facing technological and professional challenges. Key expectations include bridging the gap between industry and academia, increasing student enrolment and aligning skills with regional and market demands. Participants see the potential for employment-oriented curriculum integration, as laid down by NEP 2020, which could reduce skill gaps and foster WIL. Benefits also extend to students in remote areas, offering equitable access to employability initiatives. Institutions anticipate improved student outcomes, higher job satisfaction, and opportunities for networking, collaboration and life skills development, ultimately creating a competitive edge for universities and their graduates.

6.1.6 Key topics and issues participants wished to explore during the workshop

Participants expressed interest in topics aimed at enhancing graduate employability in open universities. Key areas include designing skill-based curricula that integrate soft, vocational and future skills, aligning with frameworks like the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and NCVET guidelines. They emphasised the importance of addressing challenges such as bridging the gap between industry and academia, improving industry collaboration and providing career counselling and placement support. Other priorities include discussing systemic issues like flexible compliance with UGC guidelines, addressing faculty shortages and overcoming the disconnect between learners and teachers in distance learning.

6.2 Post-workshop Evaluation and Feedback

Objective: To assess participants' learning outcomes, enhanced knowledge, perceived skill development and overall feedback on the workshop experience.

The post-workshop questionnaire was completed by 16 participants, and the results provide insights into their baseline knowledge and confidence levels across key areas.

6.2.1 Gender

Thirteen men and three women completed the post-workshop survey. This highlights an opportunity to improve the representation of women in future workshops to foster greater diversity and inclusivity.

6.2.2 Role in institution

The participants who completed the post-workshop survey indicated they held the following roles in their institutions:

- **Assistant professors:** 7
- **Professors:** 2
- **Associate professors:** 2
- **Directors:** 3
- **Registrars:** 1
- **Senior consultant:** 1

6.2.3 Post-workshop knowledge and confidence levels across different parameters of graduate employability
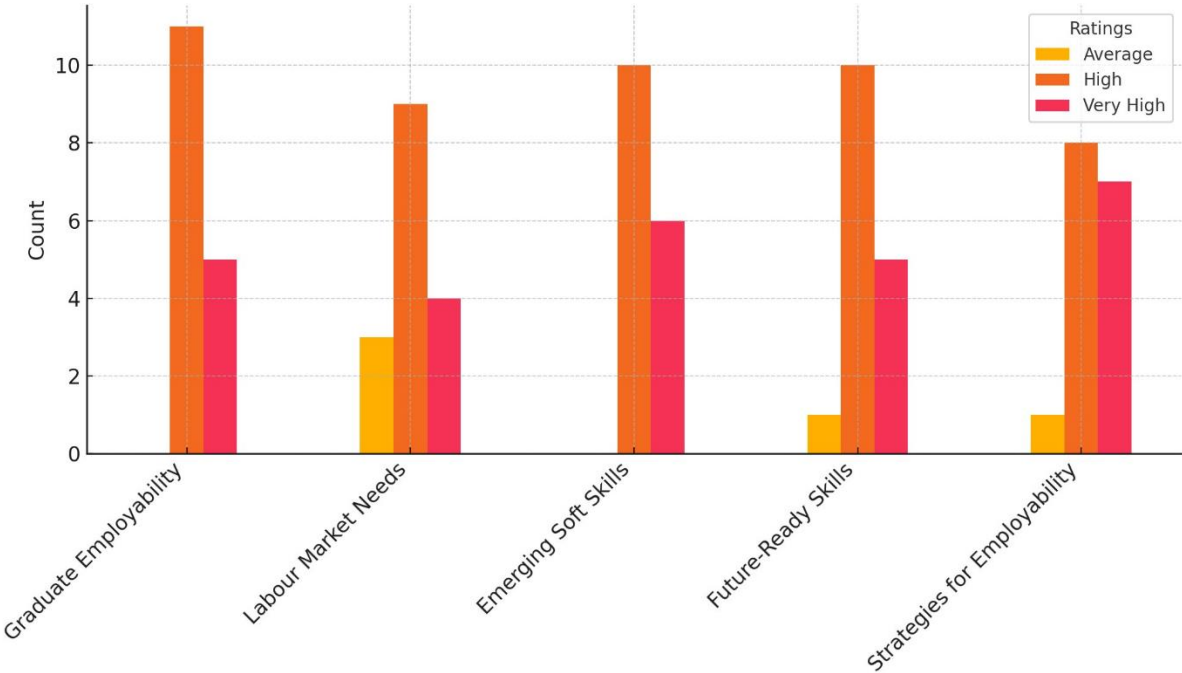
Graph showing the knowledge and confidence levels of participants along five key parameters after the workshop.

The post-workshop results demonstrate a substantial improvement in participants' knowledge and confidence across all categories. The overwhelming shift from "High" to "Very High" ratings reflects the workshop's success in delivering targeted, impactful content. The categories Graduate Employability, Labour Market Needs, Emerging Soft Skills, and Future-ready Skills saw significant increases in "Very High" ratings, showing that participants felt better equipped to address these topics in their professional contexts.

The workshop's structure, which combined theoretical insights with practical applications (e.g., group discussions, presentations and interactive sessions), played a critical role in this improvement. The absence of "Low" or "Very Low" ratings in both pre-and post-workshop data indicates that the participants had a foundational understanding before the workshop, and the workshop helped to improve their confidence.

6.2.4 Overall workshop feedback and impressions
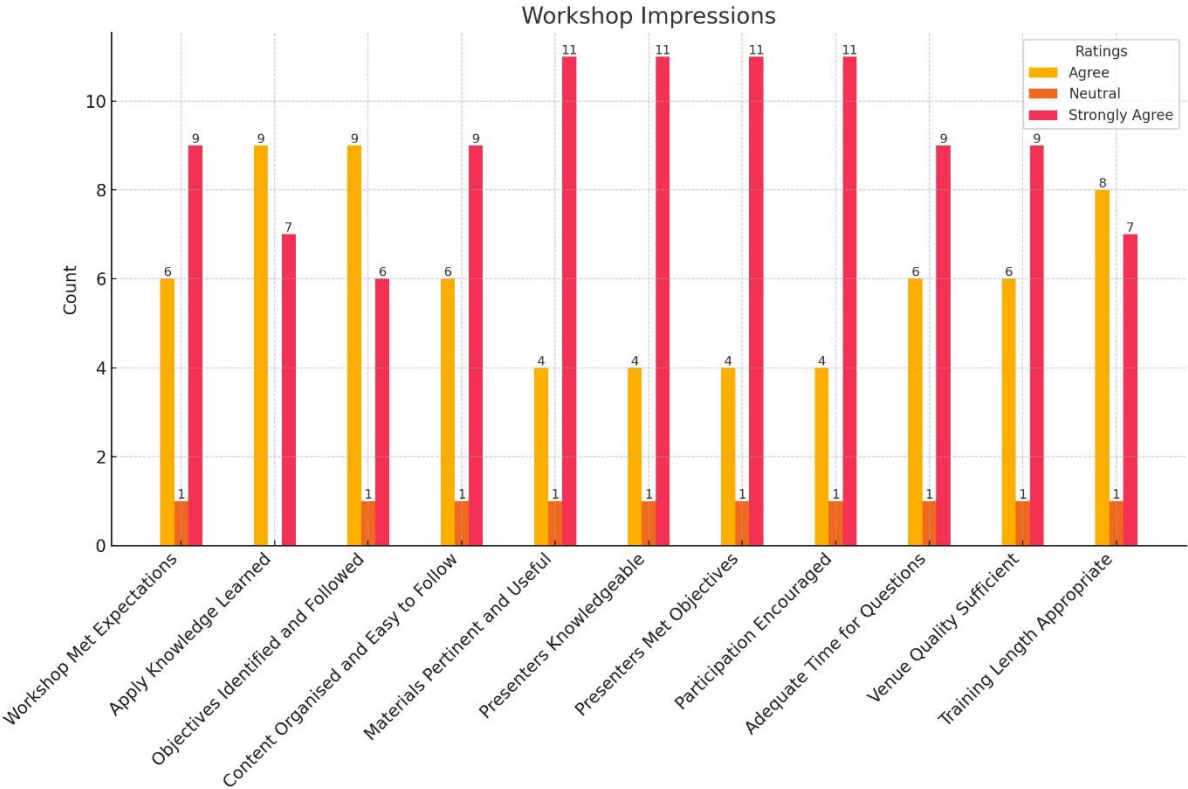
Graph showing participant impressions of the workshop according to 11 criteria.

The graph reveals overwhelmingly positive feedback, with "Strongly Agree" being the dominant response across all categories. Participants particularly appreciated the knowledgeability of presenters, interaction and participation, and the organisation and relevance of content and materials. The workshop also met its objectives effectively, as reflected in the alignment between the topics and the participants' expectations.

A few "Agree" and minimal "Neutral" responses suggest minor areas for improvement, possibly related to time management or further tailoring the sessions to individual needs. Overall, the responses indicate that the workshop was highly engaging, well-structured and impactful.

6.2.5 Aspects of the workshop participants enjoyed

The feedback highlights that the participants found various aspects of the workshop engaging and valuable, with a strong emphasis on group discussions. A significant number of responses explicitly mentioned group discussions as the most enjoyable aspect, underscoring the importance of collaborative and interactive learning experiences. Additionally, participants appreciated exploring institutional graduate employability practices and the session on mainstreaming graduate employability and emerging skills, indicating that the content was relevant and aligned with their professional needs. The Employability Model by COL and the expert contributions were also commended, suggesting that the workshop provided a practical scorecard and insights. Other notable mentions include the quality of content, resource persons, presentations and the interactive structure of the sessions. One participant quoted, "All the aspects of the workshop were fruitful. The discussions and the group activities are the aspects I enjoyed the most." Overall, the feedback suggests that the workshop was well-structured, engaging and impactful, fostering both individual and group learning.

6.2.6 Areas for improvement in the workshop

The feedback suggests improvements in time management, with a need for better scheduling and more time for discussions and group activities. In the feedback form, one of the participants quoted, "I think more time can be devoted to group discussion because adequate time was not given to put sequence to thoughts and ideas." Participants also emphasised the inclusion of a plan for a way forward with actionable recommendations and goals. Making theoretical aspects more interactive was another suggestion. While some participants expressed no need for changes, refining the schedule and focusing on actionable outcomes could enhance the workshop's impact.

6.3 Conclusion

The comparison between pre- and post-workshop results shows that the workshop was well-received and impactful. It succeeded in moving participants from a general understanding of key topics to a more confident and in-depth understanding. The emphasis on interactive elements like group discussions and applied learning, along with the alignment of content to participants' professional needs, appears to have been a key driver of these results. The workshop not only met but exceeded expectations by enabling participants to feel ready for the future and capable of mainstreaming graduate employability strategies effectively.

7. Recommendations

Based on the discussions, presentations and group work during the workshop, the following key recommendations were proposed for open universities and COL-CEMCA.

Recommendations for open universities

1. Curriculum alignment and skill integration:
   o Revise and align curricula with industry demands by incorporating 21st-century skills such as digital literacy, emotional intelligence and problem-solving.
   o Introduce modular, skill-based courses and ensure their alignment with national frameworks like the NEP 2020 and NCVET initiatives.
2. Collaboration with industry:
   o Establish MOUs with industries for internships, on-the-job training and mentorship programmes.
   o Develop industry advisory panels to ensure continuous feedback on the development of employability skills.
3. Creation and adoption of OER:
   o Develop OER to ensure equitable access to quality learning materials across institutions.
   o Encourage faculty to create customised OER focusing on skill development, career readiness and industry-specific competencies.
   o Ensure open licensing for all skill-based materials, allowing reuse, remixing and redistribution for broader educational impact.
4. Implementation of the Graduate Employability Scorecard:
   o Adopt and refine the Graduate Employability Scorecard for regular institutional assessment and continuous improvement.
   o Use the scorecard to track progress across multiple employability dimensions, ensuring data-driven interventions.
5. Career support services:
   o Strengthen career counselling cells in open universities to offer guidance on career pathways and employment opportunities.
   o Organise job fairs, placement drives and mentorship programmes to connect students with potential employers.
6. Focus on marginalised groups:
   o Expand outreach to migrant workers, rural populations, persons with disabilities and those in conflict zones through ODL models.
   o Develop financial literacy and entrepreneurship courses to support self-employment initiatives among marginalised groups.
7. Institutional collaboration and policy advocacy:
   o Promote collaboration among open universities through the formation of a consortium to share best practices and resources.
   o Advocate for policy-level changes that encourage the inclusion of micro-credentials and credit transfer frameworks.
8. Monitoring and evaluation:
   o Establish feedback mechanisms to measure the impact of skill-based interventions on graduate employment outcomes.
   o Develop an employability dashboard on a national level to benchmark institutional performance and share successful strategies.

Recommendations for COL-CEMCA

1. Capacity building for faculty and administrators:
   - Conduct regular training and capacity-building workshops for faculty on employability skill integration and experiential learning.
   - Encourage faculty exchange programmes with industry experts to foster practical insights into skill development.
2. Conduct region-specific workshops: Organise four region-specific workshops on the Graduate Employability Framework in North, South, East, and West-Central India to address regional variations and ensure broader institutional engagement regarding the next steps in the project timeline.

These recommendations aim to foster a systematic and collaborative approach towards improving graduate employability across open universities in India, ensuring alignment with global standards and national development goals.

8. Conclusion

The Graduate Employability in Open Universities: A Stakeholders' Consultative Workshop marked a significant step in addressing the multifaceted challenges of enhancing graduate employability in India. The project, conceived by the COL and COL-CEMCA and the workshop hosted at MPBOU, brought together a diverse group of teaching faculty members, administrators and policymakers to explore strategic frameworks for aligning open university education in India with workforce demands.

The workshop underscored the critical role of open universities in democratising education and equipping graduates with the skills necessary to thrive in a dynamic job market. Through technical sessions, expert-led presentations, group discussions and hands-on activities, participants delved into key topics such as emerging soft skills, institutional best practices and the importance of aligning curricula with industry needs. The Employability Project introduced by COL and COL-CEMCA provided a structured approach for assessing and enhancing employability efforts, while the Graduate Employability Scorecard offered a practical tool for measuring progress and identifying areas for improvement in their respective universities.

Key insights emerged from the discussions, including the need for integrating modular and skill-based courses, strengthening industry collaborations and promoting experiential learning through internships and business simulations. The workshop also highlighted the importance of initiatives such as capacity building for faculty and administrators, fostering entrepreneurship and leveraging digital tools like OER.

Participants commended the collaborative efforts of COL, COL-CEMCA, and MPBOU for providing a platform that encouraged the exchange of ideas and practical solutions. The workshop's inclusive approach enabled institutions to share their successes and challenges, resulting in actionable recommendations tailored to diverse educational contexts. MPBOU, as the host institution, played a pivotal role in facilitating these discussions and underscored its commitment to driving innovation in open education.

While the workshop successfully enhanced participants' knowledge and confidence in addressing employability challenges, feedback indicated areas for improvement, such as the need for a roadmap for implementing the strategies discussed. These insights provide valuable direction for future initiatives under this project.

Looking ahead, the project will focus on translating the outcomes of this workshop into concrete actions. A key future initiative involves conducting region-specific workshops on the Graduate Employability Framework, tailored to the diverse educational and workforce contexts across India. These workshops will follow the established timeline of the project, ensuring sustained momentum and deeper institutional engagement from the open universities in India.

In conclusion, the workshop has set the foundation for transformative change in graduate employability across India's open universities. By adopting the recommendations and leveraging the frameworks provided, open universities can bridge the gap between academic learning and market needs, ensuring their graduates are not only employable, but also equipped to contribute meaningfully to a rapidly evolving global workforce.

Addenda

Addendum A

Attendance registers with details of gender

Name	Gender	Designation and department	University/Institute	State	Attendance
Dr Pranab Saikia	Male	Professor, Education	Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University	Assam	Present
Professor Baljit Singh Khehra	Male	Registrar	Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala	Punjab	Present
Dr Anirban Ghosh	Male	Director, Centre for Internal Quality Assurance: School of Vocational Studies (CIQA)	Netaji Subhas Open University	West Bengal	Present
Dr Niranjan Raj S.	Male	Director – Centre for Internal Quality Assurance	Karnataka State Open University	Karnataka	Present
Dr Pushkar Dubey	Male	Head, Management & Dy Director, CIQA	Pandit Sundarlal Sharma (Open) University Chhattisgarh	Chhattisgarh	Absent
Dr Reshamlal Pradhan	Male	Head, Computer Science & Dy Director, CIQA	Pandit Sundarlal Sharma (Open) University Chhattisgarh	Chhattisgarh	Present
Dr S. V. A. Prakash	Male	Assistant Professor and Co-ordinator, School of Continuing Education	Tamil Nadu Open University	Tamil Nadu	Present
Dr R. Arumugam	Male	Assistant Professor, School of Politics and Public Administration	Tamil Nadu Open University	Tamil Nadu	Present
Dhammaratna Shriram Jawale	Male	Academic Co-ordinator (Assistant Professor), School of Humanities and Social Sciences	Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University, Nashik	Maharashtra	Present
Dr Gopal Datt	Male	Assistant Professor, School of Vocational Studies	Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani	Uttarakhand	Present
Professor Ashutosh Kumar Bhatt	Male	Professor, School of Computer Science & IT	Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani	Uttarakhand	Present
Dr Vikas Maurya	Male	Co-ordinator	Jharkhand State Open University	Jharkhand	Absent
Dr Prem Sagar Keshari	Male	Ranchi to Bhopal	Jharkhand State Open University	Jharkhand	Absent
Dr Subhash Shrawan Sonune	Male	Assistant Professor, School of Education	Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University	Maharashtra	Present
Sangeeta Kumari	Female	Assistant Professor, School of Education	Nalanda Open University	Bihar	Present
Dr Rabindranath Solomon	Male	Director, Centre for Skill Development	Dr B.R. Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad	Telangana	Present
Dr Shivang M. Patel	Male	Associate Professor, Computer Science	Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University	Gujarat	Present
Dr Suchithra K R	Female	Assistant Professor & Faculty in charge, Department of Economics	Sreenarayanaguru Open University	Kerala	Present
Professor B. Arun Kumar	Male	Professor, Political Science; Director: Centre for Entrepreneurship & Skill Development	Vardhman Mahaveer Open University, Kota	Rajasthan	Present

Dr Kiran Pandey	Female	Assistant Professor	Nalanda Open University	Bihar	Present
Dr Trivikram Tiwari	Male	Assistant Director / Assistant Professor, School of Social Sciences	Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University, Prayagraj	Uttar Pradesh	Present

Addendum B

Baseline study data summary

1. Overview

The baseline study evaluates the employability readiness of Indian State Open Universities (SOUs) using the Commonwealth of Learning's (COL) Institutional Employability Scorecard. It has the following aims:

- Adapt the COL's Institutional Employability Scorecard for Indian SOUs.
- Assess current employability practices of Indian SOUs against COL's adapted Employability Scorecard.
- Identify key challenges experienced by higher education institutions.
- Identify success factors.
- Suggest actionable recommendations to enhance employability readiness.
- Share findings of this review at a stakeholders' meeting for making future action plans.

The study aligns with the NEP 2020, the National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (NPSDE) 2015, and UGC guidelines on employability enhancement.

2. Methodology

2.1 Survey Development

- The survey was designed using COL's Institutional Employability Scorecard and customised for Indian SOUs.
- The survey covers four key stages of employability:
    1. Career awareness (year 1)
    2. Career counselling and skill development (year 2)
    3. Practical training and evaluation (year 3)
    4. Career support pre-/post-graduation (final year and beyond)
- A five-point Likert scale (1 = "No progress", 5 = "Full implementation") was used to assess the level of IGEP implementation.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

- Survey distribution: Sent to SOU representatives via COL-Canada.
- Follow-up: Conducted by COL-Canada and COL-CEMCA.
- Data processing:
    o Mean employability readiness scores were calculated.
    o The performance of focus areas was analysed.
    o Qualitative responses categorised into challenges and success factors.

- Stakeholder consultation: Results were presented at a meeting on December 12, 2024, at Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University (MPBOU), Bhopal.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Overall Employability Readiness Score

- **Mean Employability Score**: **3.0 → "Employability Partially Met"**

3.2 Stage-wise Employability Readiness

Stage	Stage Mean Score	Employability Readiness	Observations
Stage 1 (Career Awareness – Year 1)	3.6	Employability Fully Met	There are strong awareness initiatives, but deeper career guidance is needed.
Stage 2 (Career Counselling and Skill Development – Year 2)	3.0	Employability Partially Met	Moderate progress has been made, but more structured career planning and industry exposure are needed.
Stage 3 (Practical Training and Evaluation – Year 3)	3.3	Employability Partially Met	Some practical skills have been integrated, but there is a lack of industry partnerships.
Stage 4/5 (Career Support Pre-/Post-Graduation – Final Year and Beyond)	2.3	Employability Not Met	There is weak transition support for graduates (placements, internships, funding and industry networks).

3.3 Focus Area Performance Analysis

Best-performing IGEPs (Areas of Strength)

Focus Area	Stage	Focus Area Mean Score	Employability Readiness
Functional and Practical Subject-Based Skills	Stage 3	4.1	Fully Met
Opportunities to Explore Different Disciplines	Stage 1	4.1	Fully Met
Delivery of 21st-century Hard and Soft Skills	Stage 2	3.6	Fully Met

Low-Performing IGEPs (Areas of Concern)

Focus Area	Stage	Mean Score	Employability Readiness
Final-Year Entrepreneurial Presentations/Business Pitches	Stage 4/5	1.8	Not Met
Business Simulations	Stage 3	1.9	Not Met
Job Brokerage Services	Stage 4/5	2.0	Not Met
Career Preparedness Surveys	Stage 2	2.1	Not Met

4. Key Challenges and Success Factors

4.1 Common Challenges Identified

Stage	Challenges
Stage 1 and 2	Lack of career awareness, limited engagement with industry, difficulty in reaching diverse student demographics.
Stage 3	Limited industry partnerships, outdated curriculum, lack of hands-on experience opportunities.
Stage 4/5	Weak alumni networks, poor tracking of graduate employment outcomes, limited funding for placements and entrepreneurship.
Others	Insufficient policy support, infrastructure gaps and a lack of faculty training in employability skills development.

4.2 Success Factors for IGEP Improvement

- Strengthen industry collaborations for internships, mentorship and job placements.
- Embed transferrable skills (communication, teamwork and critical thinking) into all programmes.
- Establish a national-level internship and job placement portal for SOUs.
- Improve faculty capacity building for embedding employability in curricula.
- Leverage technology (massive open online courses [MOOCs], blended learning) for employability training.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Institutional and Policy-level Actions

- Develop common OER for generic employability skills and 21st-century competencies.
- Establish credit transfer mechanisms for skill-based courses between SOUs.
- Promote collaborative employability programmes (joint online seminars and industry partnerships).
- Increase faculty training on embedding employability into curricula.

5.2 Industry and Stakeholder Engagement

- Develop a common internship and job placement portal for SOUs.
- Strengthen industry mentorship and advisory networks.

- Establish entrepreneurship incubation centres to support student startups.

5.3 Funding & Sustainability

- Encourage CSR funding from industries to support skill development.
- Collaborate with government skill development initiatives (Skill India, Make in India) to align with national priorities.
- Seek financial support for infrastructure, tools and faculty development.

6. Conclusion

- SOUs have made moderate progress in employability readiness, with strong performance in early career awareness but weak post-graduation support.
- Key gaps include limited industry linkages, lack of practical learning experiences and weak job placement mechanisms.
- Immediate interventions in career services, industry collaboration and entrepreneurship support are necessary to bridge the employability gap.

With targeted improvements, SOUs can significantly enhance their employability outcomes, aligning with the NEP 2020 and national skill development priorities.

Addendum C
Pre-workshop questionnaire

Graduate Employability in Open Universities:
A Stakeholders' Consultative Workshop: Pre-Workshop Questionnaire

Organised by

Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in collaboration with Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University

Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India
10–12 December 2024

Kindly complete this pre-workshop questionnaire to help us understand your expectations of the workshop better. The data collected will be used only in an aggregated form and no individual will be identified.

1. Indicate your gender.

2. Indicate your institution.

3. Indicate your role in the institution.

4. Please rate yourself on the following statements below:	Very Low	Low	Average	High	Very High
My level of knowledge and confidence in graduate employability					
My level of knowledge and confidence in labour market needs					
My level of knowledge and confidence in emerging soft skills required by students					
My level of knowledge and confidence in infusing graduate employability skills into courses					

5. What do you hope to achieve by attending this workshop? Please list any specific skills, knowledge or insights you aim to gain.

6. What are the main opportunities or benefits that you see or expect from adopting graduate employability processes in your context?

7. What are some of the key topics or issues that you would like to learn more about or discuss during the workshop?

7. Any other comments

Graduate Employability in Open Universities:
A Stakeholders' Consultative Workshop: Post-Workshop Questionnaire

Organised by

Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in collaboration with Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University

Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India
10–12 December 2024

Kindly complete this post-workshop questionnaire to inform our workshop report and future planning around similar workshops. The data collected will be used only in an aggregated form and no individual will be identified.

1. Indicate your gender (question optional; only for statistical purposes).

2. Indicate your institution.

3. Describe your role at your institution.

4. Please rate yourself on the following statements below:	Very Low	Low	Average	High	Very High
My level of knowledge and confidence in graduate employability and emerging skills in India after the workshop					
My level of knowledge and confidence in labour market needs after the workshop					
My level of knowledge and confidence in emerging soft skills required by students after the workshop					
My level of knowledge and confidence in building future-ready skills after the workshop					
My level of knowledge and confidence in strategies for mainstreaming graduate employability and emerging skills after the workshop					

5. Please indicate your impressions of the following items:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The workshop met my expectations.					
I will be able to apply the knowledge I learned.					
The workshop objectives for each topic were identified and followed.					
The content was organised and easy to follow.					
The materials distributed were pertinent and useful.					
The presenters were knowledgeable.					
The presenters met the workshop objectives.					
Participation and interaction were encouraged.					
Adequate time was provided for questions and discussion.					
The quality of the venue was sufficient.					
The length of the training workshop was in order.					

6. Please indicate which aspects of the workshop you enjoyed.

7. Which aspects of the workshop could be improved?

8. Any other comments

Addendum E
Agenda

Time	Session Theme	Expert
DAY 1 **10 December 2024**		
8:30 am – 9:00 am	Breakfast	
9:00 am –1:30 pm	Visit to Sanchi Stupa from the Guest House (Lunch at Sanchi)	
2:30 pm – 3:30 pm	Visit to National Institute of Technical Teachers' Training and Research, Bhopal	
5:00 pm – 6:30 pm	**Workshop Inauguration**	
5:00 pm – 5:05 pm	Arrival of Guests and Lighting of the Lamp	
5:05 pm – 5:10 pm	Welcoming Guests and Felicitation	
5:10 pm – 5:15 pm	Welcome – Dr B. Gopal Krishna, Co-ordinator of the Workshop	
5:15 pm – 5:35 pm	Address by Chief Guest Professor Chandra Charu Tripathi, Director, NITTTR, Bhopal	
5:35 pm – 5:55 pm	Address by Dr B. Shadrach, Director, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, New Delhi, India	
5:55 pm – 6:05 pm	Address by Professor Sanjay Tiwari, Honourable Vice Chancellor, M. P. Bhoj Open University	
6:05 pm – 6:10 pm	Vote of Thanks by Dr Sushil Manderia, Registrar, M. P. Bhoj Open University	
6:10 pm – 6:12 pm	National Anthem	
6:17 pm – 6:30 pm	High tea	

Time	Session Theme	Expert

DAY 2		
11 December 2024		
09:30 am – 10:00 am	*Workshop Registration*	
Time	**Session Theme**	**Expert**
10:00 am – 11:15 am	Welcome Note	Professor Sanjay Tiwari, Vice Chancellor, Madhya Pradesh Bhoj (Open) University, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India
	Opening Remarks	Dr B. Shadrach, Director, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, New Delhi, India
	Introduction to the Graduate Employability Project	Professor Jane-Frances Agbu and Dr Jako Olivier, Advisors – Higher Education, Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, Canada
	Expectations from the workshop	All participants
11:15 am – 11:45 am	Tea Break	
11:45 am – 12:45 pm	Overview of the status review of graduate employability and emerging skills in India Presentation, followed by a Q&A session	Dr O. P. Goel, Former Advisor, NSDC, New Delhi, India
12:45 pm – 1:30 pm	Lunch	
1:30 pm – 2:30 pm	Group discussion on Understanding Graduate Employability, followed by the presentation of 10 minutes each	Moderated by Dr O. P. Goel, Former Advisor, NSDC, New Delhi, India
2:30 pm – 3:00 pm	Presentation of 10 minutes each (3 groups)	
3:00 pm – 4:00 pm	Presentation on Employability practices and emerging skills in Australia, followed by a Q&A session	Professor Sarojni Choy, Senior Fellow of Higher Education, Griffith University, Australia

4:00 pm – 5:00 pm	Panel Discussion on Bridging the Gap: Merging Skills with Employability in Madhaya Pradesh	Shri C. P. Sharma, Managing Director, Daulat Ram Engineering Services Private Limited Mandideep Dr Rajesh Khambayat Professor, Head of the Department, Department of Technical and Vocational Education, National Institute of Technical Teachers Training and Research, Bhopal Shri Rajeev Agrawal President, Association of All Industries, Mandideep. Jatinder Vir Yakhmi, PhD, Senior Professor at HBNI, Former Chairman, AEES, Ex DAE Raja Ramanna Fellow, HBNI, Mumbai
5:00 pm onwards	Tribal Museum, Bhopal tour and dinner	

Day 3: **12 December 2024**		
Time	**Session Theme**	**Expert**
09:00 am – 9:30 am	*Exploring institutional graduate employability practices*	Dr Ashish Awadhiya, Assistant Director, Training and Development, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India
9:30 am – 10:40 am	Group work to discuss graduate employability initiatives and best practices in different institutions and reporting to the plenary	Moderated by Dr Ashish Awadhiya, Assistant Director, Training and Development, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India

	Group discussion for 40 minutes followed by presentation of 10 minutes each (3 groups)	
10:40 am – 11:00 am	Tea Break	
11:00 am – 11:30 am	Presentation / Overview of the findings of the Graduate Employability Scorecard	Dr Ashish Awadhiya, Assistant Director, Training and Development, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India
11:30 am – 12:30 pm	Group work on reviewing findings from the scorecard Participants discuss scorecard, Processes to adapt, and Best Practices Group discussion followed by presentation of 10 minutes each (3 groups)	Group work to be moderated by Dr Ashish Awadhiya, Assistant Director, Training and Development, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, India Group presentation to be moderated by Dr B. Shadrach, Director, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, New Delhi, India
12:30 pm – 1:30 pm	Lunch	
1:30 pm – 2:00 pm	*Strategies for mainstreaming graduate employability and emerging skills in OUs in India* Graduate Employability: Recommendations, Way Forward, Action Plan and Support to Achieve Goals Break into groups to discuss key challenges and next steps to mainstreaming graduate employability • Regulatory frameworks • Capacity building • Quality assurance • Business models • Course enhancement and skills development, etc.	Group work to be moderated by Dr O. P. Goel, Former Advisor, NSDC, New Delhi, India

2:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Proposal for way forward recommendations, action plan and goals for enhancing skills, performance, and training. Group discussion followed by the presentation of 10 minutes each.	Group Presentation to be moderated by Professor (Dr) Sanjay Tiwari and Dr B. Shadrach
3:00 pm – 3:30 pm	*Tea Break*	
3:30 pm – 4:30 pm	*Post-workshop evaluation, wrap-up* *Closing remarks* *Vote of thanks*	*Professor (Dr) Sanjay Tiwari and Dr B. Shadrach* *Dr Vibha Mishra, Director, CIQA, MPBOU, Bhopal*